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287

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## Genetic Tensions of Emerson's Essay on Self-Reliance

CHARLES H. LYTTLE  
(Published in 1841)

Every historian knows what Napoleon meant (and Emerson quoted): "History is a fable agreed upon." One cannot accept the epigram unreservedly, of course; seldom has deliberate fiction been palmed off for fact; nor has unwitting fiction been accepted as fact by the generality of careful investigators when common sense and newly disclosed data have justified a challenge. But beneath the accepted surface facts of tradition, research is constantly disclosing others, hidden by chance or by purpose, which may eventually modify to a greater or less degree the official record and the conventional interpretation.

Since the publication of twenty-five of the one hundred and seventy-three extant *mss* sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson (edited by A. C. McGiffert, Jr., *Young Emerson Speaks*, 1938) and six volumes of hitherto unpublished letters (edited by Ralph L. Rusk, 1939) these observations are singularly applicable to the former Unitarian clergyman of Boston who, in his later role as a lecturer-preacher, from his Arden in Concord, published in 1841 the first volume of his *Essays*—one of the epochal books of American religion, philosophy and culture. Upon the evolution of his convictions, the liberation of his conscience and the subsequent deflection of his career, this new treasure of source material sheds revealing light.

Never before have we been equipped adequately to analyze or appraise the profound intellectual wrestlings, probings and questings which preceded the systematic (so far as Emerson was capable of being systematic) exposition of his gospel for the New World democracy that he gives us in the *Essays*,—the gospel in whose propagation "the greatest of the preachers of the democratic faith . . . moved the young men of the middle period as no other figure of his age."<sup>1</sup> Never before have we been enabled to see so clearly how this evangelical motivation was congenitally allied with another quite as powerful—personal ambition for literary achievement and eminence; and how the two motives spurred each other to produce the genius of rhetorical expression in prose and poetry who

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<sup>1</sup>R. H. Gabriel, *American Democratic Thought*, 1940, p. 20.



was likewise a genius of spiritual wisdom and ethical inspiration. Never before have we had the means to discern the deep tensions of reason and conscience which generated the emotional intensity of the essay on Self-Reliance with its impassioned scorn of compromise and expediency, its thrilling challenges to integrity and independence. Nor has the genesis of the gospel of the Over-Soul in his anxious speculations, his wide, exotic reading, the provocations of Aunt Mary Moody Emerson and his resistance thereto, been so clearly traceable heretofore. With the disclosures of the new material, the cryptically autobiographical character of the essays on History, Self-Reliance and the Over-Soul peeps out through every counsel, maxim, sarcasm, and lofty apostrophe. Now, as not hitherto, can we explain that eloquence with which Emerson exhorted the youth of the young republic.

The whole first book of *Essays* is like a great Norman castle of egotheism, with History as the portcullis, Prudence, Heroism, Friendship, Compensation, Spiritual Laws, Friendship, Love, Circles, Intellect, Art as turrets along the walls; the Over-Soul as the Romanesque chapel and Self-Reliance as the donjon—the seat and peak of power. Fourteen years (1818-1832) of inner conflict are in the latter essay—years of ambition, consecration, doubt, self-distrust, skepticism, opportunism, accommodation, self-contempt, the stress of poverty, the wounds of sorrow; and then nine years more (1832-1841) of brave emancipation, daring trust, the exultation of free, honest selfhood.

The rather nonchalant title of the book (*Essays*) obscures the fact that it contains the religious message which had been brewing in Emerson's soul for almost twenty years, and which he had repeatedly planned to promulgate in print.<sup>2</sup> Whatever his outward

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<sup>2</sup>"There is another sort of book which appears now and then in the course of the world, once in two or three centuries perhaps, and which sooner or later gets a foothold in popular esteem. I allude to those books which collect and embody the wisdom of their times and so mark the pages of human improvement. Such are the Proverbs of Solomon, the Essays of Montaigne and pre-eminently the Essays of Bacon. . . . I should like to add another volume . . . there are some reasons that induce me to suppose that the undertaking of this enterprise does not imply any considerable arrogance." (1824—Bliss Perry, *The Heart of Emerson's Journals*, p. 240. See also entry for Jan. 6, 1832, *Journals II*, p. 54; Rusk, *Letters, I*, p. 447, June 25, 1835): "Moreover, I please myself with a purpose of publishing, by and by, a book of essays, chiefly upon Natural Ethics with the aim of bringing a pebble or two to the edification of the new temple whilst so many wise hands are demolishing the old."

reticence and humanity, Emerson had been deeply motivated since his college years, possibly from boyhood, with a twofold ambition: to be a religious reformer; to win literary influence and renown. The provenance of this duplex aspiration we shall trace later; its existence is patent in many a *Journal* entry. The plain fact is that Emerson was quietly yet profoundly ambitious; as ambitious for superiority in the intellectual and moral spheres he esteemed, as any fellow Yankee, any Irish or German immigrant of those years was ambitious to gain wealth and social position in the New World.

Until 1832-3, his literary ambition and his theological aim were not co-ordinated; the certitude of power Emerson had felt (and displayed) in his writing since 1821, was hampered by an incertitude of religious conviction, or at least by indecision whether or not to abandon Christian phraseology and institutions in favor of an immanent ethical Theism, to which he had increasingly leaned since college days. The crucial year of 1831-32 (from his sermon "Self and Others" (January 28, 1831) to the sermon "Find Your Calling" of February 5, 1832) witnessed not only the crystallization of Emerson's religious philosophy of the Over-Soul, but also full recognition that spiritual integrity and literary power are mutually indispensable: "The difficulty is that we do not make a world of our own but fall into institutions already made and have to accommodate ourselves to them to be useful; and this accommodation is, I say, a loss of so much integrity and, of course, of so much power."<sup>3</sup> Less than a month after he came to this conclusion he preached a sermon "Find Your Calling" (February 5, 1832), that plainly indicates his intention to alter or to leave the Christian ministry: "Men frequently follow their father's profession . . . but . . . we continually see men of strong character changing the nature of a profession in their hands, because great powers will not sleep in a man's breast."<sup>4</sup>

To find freer, fuller opportunity for the "great powers" he was confident of possessing, *as well as* to retrieve young America by means of the gospel of the Over-Soul from the materialism and sensuality into which he thought fossilized Christianity was permitting her to slide, were the motives of Emerson's withdrawal from the professional ministry.

<sup>3</sup>*Journals*, II, p. 55. Jan. 10, 1832.

<sup>4</sup>A. C. McGiffert, Jr., *Young Emerson Speaks*, p. 257.



Hitherto, little or nothing has been noted of the first motive, perhaps because it seemed unworthy, since Emerson was regarded as wholly disinterested in his struggle for sincerity; or because the direction of his reading and the hints in his *Journal* entries were not grasped in their full import. Yet Emerson had listed synonyms since Harvard days; he had been studying rhetoric in books and in pulpits since boyhood—Buckminster, Channing, Everett, John Quincy Adams, Webster and others; he had been sipping the Elizabethans for years (Vaughan, Beaumont, Spenser, Shakespeare, Bacon) for their “lustres” and epigrammatic dexterity.<sup>6</sup> By pulpit conventions as to subject, diction, treatment, etc. he finally came to feel so constrained, so retarded that he could endure the ministry no longer. The latitude of periodical writing and of the secular lecture platform as to topic and style allured his literary ambition and seemed better to suit his gifts. The “*aliquid immensum infinitumque*” of eloquence and its fame which William Emerson, his father had desired,<sup>6</sup> was his desire and, by virtue of his liberation, was to be his reward as long as English is spoken and the American nation survives.

But force of ambition alone does not account for the genius of the *Essays*, nor is the classification of Emerson the literary climber with contemporary homesteaders and immigrant parvenus the only reason why he was for four decades our salient prophet of individualism.

Emerson's later life (1835-1882) was relatively so tranquil, his Concord tripod so stable, his fame so thriving that his official biographers, somewhat over-awed by their subject and much overweighted by Apley-Pelham inhibitions, have conveyed the impression that he glided from Unitarian Christianity to Transcendentalism, from theology to philosophy, from mediocrity to fame, with Platonic serenity.<sup>7</sup> This is illusion. Behind his tranquil poise of demeanor and expression, Emerson was for years a whirlpool of moods, hopes, doubts, compliances, lusts, scruples, resentments. Centuries of family good breeding and Puritan restraint, as well

<sup>6</sup>Cf. his reflections on entering Divinity School, Perry, *op. cit.* (1824), pp. 18, 30, etc.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid*, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup>“Emerson did not look into his own soul and write . . . nor did he look into his own fields and write” (George Boas, *Romanticism in America* (“Philosophy”) Baltimore, 1940, p. 195).

as long study of the classics, forbade him to uncover his nakedness as did Augustine, Rousseau, Dostoievsky. But *Mourning Becomes Electra* is not a wholly inaccurate allegory of the spiritual tumult behind the facade of his gentle dignity.<sup>8</sup> A surprising lack of sympathetic imagination or an equally appalling determination on the part of his New England biographers—perhaps both—to portray Emerson always as a pure, dispassionate Boddhisatva have belied the truth: that until his crucial decision for self-determination and self-assertion in 1832, (a veritable conversion experience), Emerson was tempted in all things (even as we lesser humans are); he was torn by repugnance for, yet compromise with, hypocrisy even as we are tempted; he wrestled with handicaps and tragedies that seem ghastly by modern standards, and what he attained of victory and elevation, he won by gallant struggle and high courage. "Self-Reliance" is the expression of his deep sympathy for young people similarly distraught, the tonic distillation of his victory morale for their comfort and aid. Hence, its power and permanence as a manifesto of radical individualism; hence, its place as the keystone of his new American religion.

Many aspects of his inner conflicts from 1818 to 1832 it is neither feasible nor relevant to discuss in this brief article: the grim struggle of his youth against poverty, rendered the more difficult because of the genteel social position of his family and the concomitant pressure for a Harvard education for all four sons; an inherited propensity to high nervous tension with its penalty of tuberculosis; both tension and tendency aggravated by these same family ambitions; the burden and stigma of an imbecile brother, the ill omen of another brother's mental collapse and early death; the pathos of Waldo's first marriage, one tubercular partner joined with another already doomed; the compromises and concessions of conscience necessitated by such poverty and recurrent tragedies, in order to get an income at the cost of equivocal (even though well meaning) professions of belief. Only when the shadow of financial

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. "Anything not base is desirable to bring about so good an end as this of personal purity. Be master of yourself and for the love of God keep every inch you gain. No man who, by hatred of excess has once mastered his appetites would be brought back to his bondage by any possessions." This on March 14, 1932 (*Journals*, II, p. 469). On March 29: "I visited Ellen's tomb and opened the coffin."



anxiety was lifted from his future;<sup>9</sup> when success at Lyceum lecturing confirmed his hopes<sup>10</sup> and his second wife, Lidian Jackson, braced his resolution and clarified his convictions,<sup>11</sup> did he make unmistakably clear his differences with ecclesiastical Christianity, and desist altogether from preaching and church-going.<sup>12</sup>

But it was not poverty or calamity or even bereavement that most seriously agitated Emerson from 1825 (when, after long deliberation he entered the Harvard Divinity School) to 1832 when he reached a clear comprehension of his differences with Christocentric religion, achieved a transforming conviction of his new Theistic doctrine of the Over-Soul and proceeded to give up his pulpit on the factitious issue of the use of the elements in the Lord's Supper. Nor was it the theological uncertainty and questioning which, as he increasingly perceived, crippled the full play of his maturing literary powers. His chief concern was the inner duplicity and outward ambiguity, often approaching downright disingenuousness, that were necessitated by the program of "accommodation" of his developing immanentist Theism to the Bibliocentric and Christocentric position of his congregation. This classic form of sophisticated hypocrisy, as old as Plato and Cicero, Origen and Augustine, Aquinas and Erasmus and most of the post-renaissance rational supranaturalists, might have been palatable to other clergymen but it contained possibilities of inner conflict and self-reproach grievous for one of Emerson's imperious conscience. Beneath them lurked yet another distress of spirit; he felt that he had been unduly influenced to enter the ministry and then by circumstances and proprieties constrained to continue in it. If in 1832 he confessed that he officiated at the Communion "with indifference

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<sup>9</sup>The death of his first wife made him heir to her portion of her father's estate, which later brought Emerson about \$24,000. Of the possibility, though delayed, of such modest independence, he was cognizant by February, 1832. Did this knowledge affect his decision to leave the ministry?

<sup>10</sup>His net profit for the 1837-38 course of lectures at the Masonic Temple, Boston ("Human Culture") was \$568. "Thanks and lowliest wondering acknowledgment." *Journals* II, p. 121 (Feb. 9, 1838).

<sup>11</sup>"Lidian says, it is wicked to go to church Sundays." (*Journals*, p. 120, Dec. 3, 1837.) Aunt Mary Moody Emerson had hoped that Lidian would be a conservative influence upon Waldo. On the contrary, it seems she fortified his iconoclasm! (See *ibid.*, p. 114.)

<sup>12</sup>Emerson ceased both *circa* 1839-40.



and dislike,<sup>13</sup> we may imagine many preceding Sundays of troubled conscience. But this was a minor conflict of later years compared with those skeptical musings which caused "the lungs in their spiteful lobes to sing sexton and sorrow whenever I ask them to preach a sermon" and necessitated a trip to Florida in 1826-7.<sup>14</sup> This inner strain and subsequent loss of self-confidence affected him to such an extent as to block intimate religious intercourse with his dying wife.<sup>15</sup> The very brusqueness with which, in "Self-Reliance," Emerson dramatizes his family's imagined responsibility for his choice of the ministry, and stresses the duty of disengaging oneself from their creeds and expectations reveals how galling had been this long, covert consciousness of disingenuousness, and how joyous the emancipation: "Live no longer to the expectation of these deceived and deceiving people with whom we converse. Say to them, O father, O mother, O wife, O brother, O friend, . . . I have lived with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforward I am the truth's. I appeal from your customs. I must be myself."

How his family in Concord must have raised their eyebrows at this inferential denunciation of their influence upon him! With good reason; for the surviving members of his immediate family were, to judge by all available evidence, guiltless; and his second wife, Lidian, was somewhat responsible for his growing independence. In fact, Emerson omitted from these objurgations the one person who had exerted all her powers to chain him to the work she had planned for him even in boyhood—Aunt Mary Moody

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<sup>13</sup>Perry, *Heart of Emerson's Journals*, II, p. 59 (July 15, 1832).

<sup>14</sup>Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 30: "It is not certain that God exists, but that he does not is a most bewildering and improbable chimera" (March, 1826); *Cf. Letters*, I, p. 184: "I have not succeeded in overcoming certain physical and metaphysical difficulties." (Jan., 1827).

<sup>15</sup>*Journals*, III, p. 401 (March 4, 1838). "Last night a remembering talk with Lidian. I went back to the first smile of Ellen on the door-stone of Concord [N.H.]. I went back to all that delicious relation to feel . . . how much reproach! . . . Ah, could I have felt—in the presence of the first [Ellen], as I now feel, my own power and hope, and so have offered her in every word and look the heart of a man humble and wise, but resolved to be true and perfect with God, and not, as I fear it seemed, the uneasy, uncentered joy of one who received in her a good—a lovely good—out of all proportion to his deserts, I might haply have made her days longer and certainly sweeter, and at least have recalled her seraph smile without a pang."

Emerson!<sup>16</sup> To her, indeed, Emerson and his brothers owed early incitement to distinction in Boston professional life, ministerial and legal and political. She had rehearsed the honor and the eminence of the Emerson name and lineage; she had scolded laziness and low moral standards; she had kept them reading when they ought to have been playing on the Commons; she had implanted in Waldo the aspiration (her vicarious own) to create a new theological system; to be a religious reformer and a renowned preacher, in opposition to the Humanitarians.<sup>17</sup> To this purpose she held him by years of incessant correspondence; suggesting books of note for his perusal, criticizing his manuscript sermons that she demanded be sent her; upbraiding him for his growing deflection from a Christocentric faith; reproaching and ridiculing him for resigning from the Second Church; denouncing the Divinity School address and disowning him for it in scathing terms. If any maiden aunt ever tried to dominate and determine a sensitive, introspective nephew, it was Mary Moody Emerson; if ever a nephew was responsive, submissive, patient and preposterously grateful, it was Emerson. For the poor highstrung Emerson boys she was a deadly

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<sup>16</sup>Emerson's magnanimity is shown in many a tribute, especially: "The combined traits in Aunt Mary's character, passionate piety, philosophic skepticism, an impatience of words, gave the new direction to her hope, that these boys should be richly and holily qualified and bred to purify the old faith and to import all of its fire into the new age. Such a gift should her Prometheus bring to men. She hated the poor, low, thin, unprofitable, unpoetical Humanitarians as the devastators of the church and robbers of the soul and never wearied of piling on them terms of slight and weariness." (*Journals* V, p. 458). See also *Ibid* X, 371, and J. E. Cabot, "A Glimpse of Emerson's Boyhood" in *Atlantic*, LIX, May, 1887. For a time in the early days her low esteem of the Unitarians swayed Waldo, especially as respects Edward Everett: "An exemplary Christian of today and even a minister is content to be just such a man as was a good Roman in the days of Cicero . . . contentment with a moderate standard of pagan virtue implies no very urgent necessity of Heaven's last revelation, . . . when I have been to Cambridge and studied divinity I will tell you whether I can make for myself any better system than Luther or Calvin or the liberal besoms. . . . I am tired and disgusted with the preaching I am accustomed to hear." (*Letters* I, p. 128, 1823). But Channing was different: "Dr. Channing is preaching sublime sermons every morning in Federal Street." (*Ibid.*, p. 137). Yet Emerson's admiration for Channing began to cool as his distaste for Christian apologetic increased, until by 1837 he says: "Once Dr. Channing filled our sky . . . now we are become so conscious of his limits and of the difficulty attending any effort to show him our point of view that we doubt if it be worth while. Best amputate!" (*Journals*, IV, 239).

<sup>17</sup>*I.e.* Priestley, Bentley *et al.* Aunt Mary greatly admired Channing, saving only his repugnance to war. From college days to 1860, however, Emerson shared Channing's views on this subject,



influence upon health and happiness;<sup>18</sup> Waldo alone had a strain of indolence,<sup>19</sup> and a resilient flippancy (for which life-saving trait she savagely criticized him) inherited doubtless from his genial, book-loving father, which proved invulnerable to her personal vexatiousness and her epistolary goadings. Never was he brusque with her impertinence, nor impatient with her acid counsellings, nor ungrateful for the stimuli to his intellectual and theological development and ambition for which she was responsible. But after 1832 he went his own way so far as religious views were concerned. "Self-Reliance" might well have contained another passage: "O Aunt! I will appreciate your early service to my growing mind and conscience; I will condone your eccentricities and apologize for your acerbities of tongue and temper; I will forgive your surliness in disowning me and will welcome you to my home if you will return; but in religious matters I will stand on my own feet, make my own decisions, be myself!"

Neither temperamentally nor intellectually did Emerson incline to the rigid logic of Christian theology with its argumentative apologetic. From college days there had been germinating in his mind a mystical Stoicism, an intuitive religion of ideal goodness. His pen, moreover, did not naturally trace the language of archaic Bible metaphor and homily—hence a second area of tension and conflict. On one side, then, Aunt Mary, family, church associations and ministerial precedents; on the other, natural mysticism, literary genius and conscience! We are now enabled to follow this eight-year struggle (1824-1832) step by step with the aid of the Letters and the Sermons. It involved him in evasion and dissimulation that continually hurt his conscience, maimed his literary powers—and goaded him to study, speculation and bold surmise to find a way out of theological doubts, moral scruples and literary convictions.

Emerson's problems began virtually with his father's death, for his Aunt Mary was determined to have one or more of her nephews

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<sup>18</sup>Edward who died in 1834 in the West Indies, a victim of vaulting ambition and consequent over-work, instinctively disliked her sharp, taunting tongue. Charles, her favorite, died in 1835. After a jealous struggle with Mother Emerson, whom she forbade to re-marry, she left the household.

<sup>19</sup>A habit of rambling in the woods, begun during his pulmonary weakness of 1826-27, not only saved his life but enlarged his philosophy and enriched his style.

carry on the purpose and work of vindicating Christianity against infidelity for which the well-read, broad-minded, urbane and rather easy-going Reverend William Emerson had been called to the First Church in Boston in 1799. How his sister Mary had admired him, counselled him, rebuked him for his latitudinarian views, his fondness for genial society!<sup>20</sup> When he died suddenly, Aunt Mary stepped in to superintendent the education of the four boys, to save them from sloth and sin, and especially to transfer the mantle of prophecy to the shoulders of William, the oldest brother. William, indeed, lacked his father's expansiveness and social charm, though in respect to steadfast nobility and stability of character he was Waldo's own ideal. To prepare for the church, he went through Harvard; then tried Göttingen for theology, after the fashion of the day; then came disillusionment and skepticism as to major Christian tenets, return to Boston and renunciation of the ministry for the law (1825-6). Waldo was now Aunt Mary's hope. In 1824 he had deliberately dedicated "my time, my talents and my hopes to the Church."<sup>21</sup> But not to Christ! His heart was in Athens with Socrates whom he always regarded more highly than Jesus as a man and intellectual leader.<sup>22</sup> His chief interest con-

<sup>20</sup>See George Tolman, *Mary Moody Emerson*, Concord Antiquarian Society, 1929, p. 12. Sister Mary complained of her brother's dilettanteism and defects. . . . "I conceive them to have arisen in great measure from corrupted views of the Gospel . . . oh, how differently would that ardent mind have left the world had it visioned sin and depravity as the Gospel represents them . . . had he viewed Jesus Christ in his astonishing character . . . tho I believe his piety and his endeavors to serve the interest of virtue, as far as they were disinterested, found acceptance. . . ."

<sup>21</sup>Perry, *ibid.*, p. 7, (April 18, 1824). The soliloquy abounds in introspective criticisms, in references to his literary tastes, talents and ambitions: "I cannot dissemble that my abilities are below my ambition." He aspired to pulpit excellence: "Entire success in public preaching is the lot of few, but this I am encouraged to expect." He would have the moral imagination of Channing as in the Dudleian lecture; he would have his pen "guided by such a deep and enthusiastic love of goodness and of God as dictated Comus to the Bard."

<sup>22</sup>*Two Unpublished Writings of Emerson*, I, "The Character of Socrates," published by E. E. Hale (1820): "We are led to bestow upon the pagan Socrates the praise of a perfect man . . . a patriot reformer of morals and virtue." A letter to E. P. Peabody of August 3, 1835 expands this: "Perfect in the sense of complete man Jesus seems not to me to be, but a very exclusive and partial development of the moral element. . . . The weight of his ethical sentences deserves more than all the consideration they have and his life is one original pure beam of truth but a perfect man should exhibit all the traits of humanity and should expressly recognize the intellectual nature. Socrates I call a complete, universal man, fulfilling all the conditions of man's existence. . . . I compare him not as an ethical teacher to Christ. . . . (*Letters*, I, p. 451).



tinued to be ethical philosophy, the theme of his Bowdoin prize essay at Harvard in 1821.<sup>24</sup> Plutarch's *Morals* was his prayer book.<sup>25</sup>

The reading he did in the four years of school teaching (1821-5) before entering the Divinity School (1825) was chiefly in philosophy and belles lettres. His correspondence with Aunt Mary betrays no interest in Christian doctrine; rather, there appear hints of increasing skepticism.<sup>26</sup> His aunt had no satisfactory answer for his desperate queries. She tried to dissuade him from going to Cambridge (the Divinity School) lest he grow even more heterodox.<sup>27</sup> Bravely exhorting himself not to despair, to try to school his pride and thaw his icy benevolence, to trust ambition and curiosity, and "happy will you be if the flame of ardent piety toward the Infinite Spirit shall be taught to glow in your breast," he ventured to Cambridge.

But Emerson found, like so many other young seminarians, that

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, II, *The Present State of Ethical Philosophy*: "The Christian religion comes in, supplying on the whole a grander system." On the whole, indeed! The essay abounds in disparagement of the Christian fathers and the Roman hierarchy; but high praise is given the Cambridge Platonists and Richard Price,—"far profounder than the ancients because he taught that the fundamental principles of ethics are taught by the moral sense." (Aunt Mary was very fond of Price!)

<sup>25</sup>Rusk, *Letters*, I, p. xxxi.

<sup>26</sup>*Cf.* the letter to Aunt Mary, November 11, 1823, . . . "what if the Deity's moral operations be irregular . . . if justice be mixed with injustice?" (*Journals*, I, 324). Also, the letter of April 30, 1824 to the same. Likewise, the "Letter to Plato" (May 1824): "I confess Revelation has not for me the same exclusive and extraordinary claims it has for many . . . this opinion that Revelation had become necessary to the salvation of men through some conjunction of events in heaven . . . is a vagary." In May (1824) he was almost repenting of his desire for the ministry. (*Ibid.*, p. 377). "I am the servant more than the master of my fate . . . neither metaphysics nor ethics are more than outside sciences—they give me no insight into the nature and design of my being . . . 'tis alarming to see the full and regular series of animals from mites and worms up to man . . . I am ambitious not to live in a coma . . . my soul is dark or is dead. . ."

<sup>27</sup>She did not try to answer his challenge: "What becomes of a poor slave who has never heard of virtue and never practised it and dies cursing God and man? . . . How is it that a Benevolent Spirit persists in introducing onto the stage of existence millions of new beings to pursue the same wrong road?" She talked vaguely of Christ, "Companion of God before time . . . whose deep and high theology will prevail and human madness may be cured." (*Journals*, II, p. 30, Dec. 6, 1824). She advised him to take counsel of Channing, "who was never pruned at Cambridge!"

Divinity School did no such thing! His doubts increased<sup>28</sup> and, as was usual with him when under mental strain, his health declined. He got a slight brace from a farm hand, Tarbox, a Methodist itinerant, with whom he worked in the summer of 1825—a glimpse of that transcendental egotheism he was later to immortalize, and he worked it into a first sermon, "Pray without ceasing."<sup>29</sup> For two years it was the only message he had! Yet, probably on account of poverty, he applied to the Middlesex Ministers Association for license to preach. They granted it—without examination because of his poor health. "If they had examined me," said Emerson in later days, "it would have been doubtful if they would have allowed me to preach!"<sup>30</sup> Such conscious dissimulation took its toll; his health again gave out and he went south.

In Florida he fortunately met a highly cultured, honest, upright, warm-hearted skeptic—Achille Murat! Here was a man who could believe in morality without believing in Christianity—a re-incarnated Stoic of the old classic days so dear to Emerson!<sup>31</sup> But Murat helped him not only with personal sympathy, encouragement and hospitality; he gave him a practical rationalization for the job of preaching a Christianity one's mind rejected: it is necessary for the unreasoning multitude. One must stoop to their ignorance and emotionalism to serve their moral needs. Fortified by this sophistry,<sup>32</sup> Emerson returned in better health to Cambridge to

<sup>28</sup>Cf. a letter to Aunt Mary in which he complains that "the banner inscribed by the cross has been to some a cloud and to some a pillar of fire. We must choose our own standard and our own guide. Is there no venerable tradition . . . whose genuineness and authority we can establish or must we too hurry onward ingloriously in ignorance and misery, we know not whence, we know not whither?" (*Letters*, I, p. 167, April 6, 1826). It was probably Professor Andrews Norton whose legalistic insistence upon the authority of the New Testament and the evidence of the miracles of Jesus put Emerson in a quandary for years, until he decided that moral aspiration and moral victory through fidelity to the Over-Soul, are their own evidence. (Cf. the poem written in July, 1831, *Journals*, II, pp. 394, 409, 445.)

<sup>29</sup>"The soul contains the fate that shall befall it—the actualization of its thoughts." See the sermon in McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 1. Aunt Mary complained that the sermon lacked "any allusion to a Venerable Name!"

<sup>30</sup>See Edward Emerson, *Emerson in Concord*, 1889, p. 33. Cf. a letter to Aunt Mary of August 1, 1826: "Can you not awaken a sympathetic action in my torpid faculties . . .?" Another in September 23, 1826, expresses his impatience "with so much emphasis upon the historicity and venerability of Christianity" (*Letters*, I, p. 169 and p. 184).

<sup>31</sup>Cf. *Journals*, II, pp. 155 ff. *Letters*, I, pp. 194 ff.

<sup>32</sup>He himself used this term. *Letters*, I, p. 175. The whole letter to Aunt Mary is weighty for its balancing of his actual transcendental leanings with relativity and accommodation.



resume the pursuit of his twofold ambition, literary and religious eminence.<sup>33</sup>

Preach for occasional fees he must and did; Edward's health had broken and he had gone to Europe on borrowed money; Charles was in college; Bulkeley's sanitarium expenses were inexorable. Waldo, the only earner, compromised and preached by means of a policy of accommodation plus propaganda. He would try quietly, imperceptibly if possible, to spiritualize Christianity, to give it modern reality and practicality, to lead his hearers out of traditional, antiquarian views to fresh, practical insights and applications of ethical religion.<sup>34</sup> This program worked very well from 1827 to 1830.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, practising his new regimen of alternating study with rambling in the woods, he sought to provide his unshakeable belief in the absolute authority of conscience and the Moral Law with a metaphysical rationale consistent with modern science and ancient philosophy.<sup>36</sup> As early as October, 1827 he "found much of truth in the beautiful theory, that the human mind was a portion of the Divine Mind, separated for a time, and when life was closed, re-absorbed into the Soul of the World." . . . "What is religion but this connection? Is this not unutterably beautiful and grand, this Life within life, this literal Emmanuel, God within us? When this shall have been taught to men, the principle of evil shall come to his end and God shall be all in all."<sup>37</sup>

The accommodation for a time worked well, affording calm to

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<sup>33</sup>His despondency over the slim chances he felt he had at this time for fame is touchingly revealed in a letter to Aunt Mary of March, 1827: "It is not very easy . . . for a youth, who nourishes in silence, far from fame the gift which was accompanied with a consciousness of its worth, weakly to surrender his hopes . . . to forego all these fairy visions and to say 'Thy will be done'." (*Letters*, I, p. 195).

<sup>34</sup>"We shall sometime look back on Christianity as a rosary." (*Journals*, II, Dec. 17, 1827.) In August of that year he had been reading Hume where that policy is discussed. (*Letters*, I, 206).

<sup>35</sup>But the clergy detected his purpose! After he had preached "Pray without Ceasing" in Franklin, N. H., the Ministerial Association debated "what is to be understood by praying in the name of Christ?" (*Letters*, I, p. 212).

<sup>36</sup>F. H. Hedge noted this in 1828: "In ethics he held very positive opinions." "Owe no conformity to anyone against your private judgment. Act from the simplest motives." (Cabot, *Memoir*, I, p. 130). Which Emerson was *not* doing, really!

<sup>37</sup>*Journals*, II, p. 217. Also p. 225 (Dec. 27, 1827). He used the phrase, "this literal Emmanuel" in Sermon 43, (July 1829),

conscience and pulpit fees to his purse: Ethical Theism in the study, Christianity in the pulpit. Another reason for the policy was soon added. In December, 1828 he became engaged to Ellen Tucker, which made it incumbent upon him to secure an ample, steady income. Moreover, a noted Boston church showed every sign of calling him to its pulpit. Continued accommodation, therefore, was imperative; not only love and ambition pleaded, but Emerson had not as yet arrived at a "rounded, complete" rationale of his absolute ethical faith, much less its translation into a distinctive logic and homiletical phrasing. Nevertheless, his position was sufficiently esoteric to alarm the senior minister of the Second Church whom Emerson was to supplant, Reverend Henry Ware, Jr. A letter from him warning against the use of irreverent or secular illustrations in sermons elicited a reply in which Emerson was too prudent and deferential to be quite ingenuous: "I have affected generally a mode of illustration rather bolder than the usage of our preaching warrants on the principle that our religion is nothing limited or partial but of universal application and is interested in all that interests man. I can readily suppose that I have erred in the way you mention, of failing to add to my position the authority of Scripture quotations. . . . I shall not fail to avail myself of your suggestions when I shall have occasion to repeat the sermon."<sup>38</sup>

Emerson got the call in January, and conveyed the news to Aunt Mary in a letter of exultation and gratitude: "You have always promised me success."<sup>39</sup> After so many years of hardship and discouragement his self-congratulation is touching: "I am called by an ancient and respectable church to become its pastor."<sup>40</sup> To this church he wrote a letter of acceptance of their call that committed him to further experiment in accommodation: "I look to the example of our Lord in all my hopes of advancing the influence of his holy religion."<sup>41</sup>

This means that Emerson had grimly set himself to the task of being a proper minister of a Christian Church (Unitarian in tone) and through its traditional rites and language preaching his own

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<sup>38</sup>*Letters*, I, p. 257, Dec. 30, 1828. It was "The Nativity," No. 13, McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 264. He never used it again!

<sup>39</sup>*Journals*, II, p. 258, (Jan. 6, 1829).

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 261, Jan. 17, 1829.

<sup>41</sup>*Letters*, I, p. 261. The phrase "our Lord" must be interpreted, however, by the light of *Journals*, II, p. 129 (Cambridge, November, 1826).



version of our Lord's "holy religion"—certainly not Mr. Ware's!<sup>42</sup> The tension between them comes out again very soon in a fresh correspondence occasioned by a passage in his post-ordination sermon on "The Christian Ministry." In the latter he casts scorn upon the bibliolatrous preacher.<sup>43</sup> When Mr. Ware, vigilant even in Europe, remonstrated, Emerson assured him of "great uneasiness that the idea should be given to my audience that I did not look to the Scriptures with the same respect as do others."<sup>44</sup> Yet on December 13, 1829, he writes Aunt Mary: "I am not ready to explore the way of the star-led wizards. I am looking at the same truth on quite another side and in novel relations. . . . My soul is chained down even now in its thoughts, where it should be freest, lordliest. *What a fight our lives long between prudence and sentiment.* I could think and speak to some purpose, . . . but if I must do what seems to be proper and reasonable—conform to the occasion—I can only say what is trite and will, 'tis likely, be ineffectual."<sup>45</sup>

Nine months of accommodation, with Ellen's clear strong faith to help him,<sup>46</sup> yet he felt his eloquence and earnest purpose ineffectual! His disappointment plainly shows in "A Year's Retrospect" of his ministry, (April 4, 1830).<sup>47</sup> Among other extenuations he pleads for charitable judgment on the time he spends in his study instead of making pastoral calls!<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup>"On Showing Piety at Home," his favorite sermon, composed on August 12, 1827, and used 31 times till June 5, 1831, contains just one perfunctory reference to "our Lord." McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Christianity meant for Emerson: "an infinite and universal Law which touches all action, all passion, all rational being; and is the revelation of a Deity whose being the soul cannot reject without denying itself. . . . The Scriptures are to be considered as the direct voice of the most High—the Reason of God speaking to the reason of Man." ("The Christian Minister," I, McGiffert, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 29).

<sup>43</sup>"That man has very low and humble views of this office who satisfies his conscience with uttering the commonplaces of religion for twenty or thirty minutes reciting a lazy miscellany of quotations from Scripture." (McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 25).

<sup>44</sup>*Letters*, I, p. 273 (July 1, 1829). He goes on: "I consider them as the true Record of the Revelation, which established what was almost all we wanted to know, namely, the immortality of the soul, the being and character of God. I look at the book as of divine authority and should lose a great deal more than I can spare if I lost this faith."

<sup>45</sup>*Journals*, II, pp. 277-8.

<sup>46</sup>*Letters*, I, 272. But did Ellen know what *he* thought of it? "Ellen wondered why dearest friends, even husband and wife did so little impart their religious thoughts," he regretted later. (*Journals*, II, p. 403).

<sup>47</sup>McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 73.

There he had been carrying on his old line of thought. God? "He is the individual's own soul carried out to perfection."<sup>49</sup> The soul? "Every man contemplates an angel in his future self."<sup>50</sup> A talk with Dr. Channing brought news of "a Frenchman who had written that there were two souls in the human body." One of them, reflected Emerson, must be related to conscience.<sup>51</sup> His summer *Journal* (1830) entries are full of Transcendental hints.<sup>52</sup> By September he had come to the conclusion that reverent, self-reliant individuality is a supreme good. "Let a man scorn to imitate any being, let him scorn to be a secondary man, let him fully trust his own share of God's goodness that, correctly used, will lead him on to perfection that has no type yet in the universe save only in the Divine Mind."<sup>53</sup> This thought passes into a stirring sermon, "Trust Yourself" on October 3, possibly the result of reading *Wilhelm Meister* during the summer.<sup>54</sup>

Goethe spurred him to stop accommodation and assert his own truth.<sup>55</sup> But it seems to have been the study of De Gérando's *Histoire Comparée des systèmes de Philosophie*, begun October 27, 1830, that crystallized and confirmed his own metaphysic of ethics. Never having had a systematic course in the great classic ontologists, the books were a revelation to him. Anaxagoras fascinated him; the Pythagoreans likewise, Plotinus most of all. Here was that "highest philosophy," reconciling religion, science, ethics, aesthetics, history which Bacon had predicted and Emerson had long sought. Anaxagoras said, "one single soul ran through all being, ordering matter, intimately present to man."<sup>56</sup> Pythagoras said, "The Soul is an emanation of the Divinity, a part of the soul of the world . . . man has some affinity not only with gods but with animals. . . ."

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<sup>49</sup>*Journals*, II, 295. Channing had said the same in his 1828 sermon, "Likeness to God."

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 298 (June 2, 1830).

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 299.

<sup>52</sup>He was then reading Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*; Combe's *The Constitution of Man*, "the best sermon I have read for some time." *Letters*, I, p. 291. Reed's *Growth of the Mind* was also influential.

<sup>53</sup>*Journals*, II, p. 310.

<sup>54</sup>McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>55</sup>Goethe's Spinozist views must also have influenced him. In *Representative Men*, Emerson says: "the old eternal genius who built the world has confided himself more to this man [Goethe] than any other . . . he is the pivotal man of the old and new times for us."

<sup>56</sup>Quotations are from the Blotting Book extracts, *Journals*, II, pp. 330-352.

Coupled with these extracts are quotations from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* on the four religions; and from Cuvier's *Life*: "the true method is to view each being in the midst of all others."

Somewhere between October 27 and December 10, 1830, Emerson came to a fairly spherical apprehension of the truth of the Over-Soul and of the dignity and duty of Self-Reliance (which is to be understood as God-in-one's-self Reliance).<sup>67</sup> These indicated in his mind the mystical, "highest philosophy" of absolute ethics, of virtue as its own evidence and guarantee, of immortality, of miracle as natural and ubiquitous, of homeliest domestic things as sacred, of the Moral Law as self-sanctioning and self-enacting, of sensuality as suicidal of the spirit, of ancient scriptures, creeds, rites as "husks and outworn shells and dry beans," of evolution as variegated soul-yearnings and God-attraction; of man's mind and body as a microcosm of God and his whole universe: "God is the substratum of all souls. Is not that the solution of the riddle of sympathy? It is worms and flesh in us that fear or sympathize with worms and flesh; and God only within that worships God."<sup>68</sup>

Here was the complete idea of the Over-Soul, adequate not only for exhortation to the attainment of moral dignity but also to social responsibility and to the correlation of mind and nature in science. It first received plenary statement in a sermon of January 12, 1831, "Self and Others," on the text: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself."<sup>69</sup> It is im-

<sup>67</sup>"Smother no dictate of your soul but indulge it . . . there is no being in the universe whose integrity is so precious as that of your soul." *Journals*, II, p. 323 (Nov. 29, 1830).

<sup>68</sup>*Journals*, II, p. 323. Emerson had already decided that "Christianity has done much to increase the fear of death in the world" (p. 316). Perhaps Ellen's critical condition had occasioned conversations with her about death. She died within two months (Feb. 8, 1831).

<sup>69</sup>McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 127. The term "Over-Soul" is later in date; the conception itself is found in the *Journals* as early as 1827 (See p. 20). It was prominent in his thought climactically to 1833—witness the sermon "Religion and Society" preached to his former congregation October 27, 1833, just after his return from Europe: "A revolution of religious opinions is taking place around us. . . . Man begins to hear a voice that fills heaven and earth, saying "God is within him"; *there* is the celestial host. . . . "I find that this amazing revelation of my immediate relation to God is a solution of all the doubts that oppressed me . . . within this erring, passionate mortal self sits a supreme, calm immortal mind; wiser than I, it never approved me in any wrong; it is the face the Creator uncovers to his child. . . . I anticipate auspicious effects from the further opening of this faith upon the public mind . . . the glory of that latter church in which a truly spiritual faith shall have been preached."

The conception seems to have arisen to meet his own and the assumed



possible to convey by quotations its certitude, elevation, and solemn tone. It is obvious that Emerson realized the radically Theistic boldness of the sermon for he adduced in behalf of the great doctrine that "God dwells in the human heart, so that man is not so much an individual as a manifestation of the eternal and universal One," the authority of Jesus, Peter, Paul, "the pious men of the Stoic sect," Fénelon, Archbishop Leighton, Henry Scougal the liberal Calvinist, George Fox and William Penn. Several passages evince a warmth and directness of ethical appeal not hitherto noticeable in his sermons.<sup>60</sup>

Yet, while this illumination had been dawning upon him, his young wife was dying; dying in her Christian faith of "the resplendent home of all the good, of the innumerable armies of martyrs, of saints and angels and of God the Judge of all."<sup>61</sup> In his anguish at her loss, perhaps in loyalty to her faith, Emerson temporarily fell back upon the assurances of "many mansions" and personal reunion of the New Testament. He argued with himself that "the devout theist and the devout Christian will agree fully as to their duty; even regeneration, justification by faith were originally solemn verities of theism"; so that "to be an enemy of Christianity is to be an enemy of one's own self."<sup>62</sup> The sole difference would be—"virtues should be done as unto God, not Christ." But by March he was again a skeptic, now questioning the interference of the Holy Ghost. He declares that a Christianity

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popular need of a substitute doctrine for that of the indwelling Christ—Paul's "Christ in you, the hope of glory." It was a useful transition idea, a philosophic-theological, homiletical and evangelical instrument. It virtually disappears after Emerson had swung fully into the lecture field and style, save for some cryptic references to "Othman" (his own ideal self) in later *Journal* entries. The latter term, like "Over-Soul," seems to be his own invention, though perhaps of Brahminic provenance ("paramatman").

<sup>60</sup>"My friend—and I speak to each one in this house—have you never suspected a greater inmate in your frail body than a frail animal life? Have you never perceived that while all things change, a Soul possesses you which changes not; which amid doubts, doubts not; which amid dejection whispers that all will be well; a Soul which, amid the clamors of temptation, breathes the low thunders of his admonition; a Soul before which you are known though you wear a mask to all the world, a soul which assures you that integrity and truth and love can never be a loss, nor crime a gain?" (McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 136).

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21. "The spectacle of triumphant faith in the dying chamber of youth where a thousand expectations are shattered." ("Consolation for the Mourner," sermon of Feb. 20, 1831, *ibid.*, p. 138).

<sup>62</sup>*Journals*, II, 355,

"that is afraid of science dishonors God and commits suicide."<sup>63</sup> By July he is sure that God does not use personal substitutes for Himself in the soul—that is "the wrong whereby theology has injured Jesus Christ, insisting upon love for him as a duty."<sup>64</sup> By October (1831) he is discontented with "congregations, temples and sermons—these great religious shows—how much sham!"<sup>65</sup> By December he had undertaken openly and boldly to persuade his people to turn Theist, in a sermon replete with secular allusions (alas, Mr. Ware!): "Let me then present to your thoughts another sentiment by which the human mind can be controlled, that of faith in God. . . . I believe we are in our fabric God-believing, God-worshipping creatures . . . a Superior Nature which pleads with and warns us from within."<sup>66</sup>

It is quite obvious that Emerson had now embarked upon a deliberate, wholehearted and confident policy of seeking to convert his congregation from their rationalist Christocentric ethical motivation to a Theocentric point of view—intuitive and immanent.<sup>67</sup> Would he have remained in the ministry with conviction and contentment had he done so? It seems unlikely, for in January he has decided that "it is the best part of a man that revolts most against his being a minister"<sup>68</sup> . . . if it will admit of accommodation he gradually bends it to his mind. If his external condition does not admit of such accommodation, he breaks the form of his life and enters a new one that does. . . . What shall poor I do who can neither visit nor pray nor preach to any avail?<sup>69</sup> Doubtless his sense of professional inadequacy, his scruples against continued equivocation, and the impatience of his literary powers for freedom were now a continual torment.<sup>70</sup>

The policy of accommodation was near its end! The sermon "Find your Calling" of February 5, 1832, tolls its knell: "Great

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>64</sup>*Journals*, II, p. 410.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 424.

<sup>66</sup>McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 162, "The Choice of Theisms."

<sup>67</sup>Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 75, cites a hitherto unpublished *Journal* entry of May, 1832: "To be at perfect agreement with a man of the most opposite conclusions you have only to translate your language into his . . . the same thought which you call God in his nomenclature is called Christ. In the language of William Penn, moral sentiment is also called Christ."

<sup>68</sup>*Journals*, II, p. 448 (Jan. 10).

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 457.

<sup>70</sup>Charles's health had now broken (he died of tuberculosis in 1835) and he had gone to join the doomed Edward in the West Indies.

powers will not sleep in a man's breast . . . every individual mind has a place which it was intended by God to fill . . . unfavorable associations, bad advice or his own perversity may fight against it but he will never be at ease, he will never act with efficiency until he finds it . . . nor even consider that your ties in life, your obligations to your family,<sup>71</sup> to your benefactors or to your creditors shut you out of your true field of action. . . .<sup>72</sup>

Yet it was still to take some months for Emerson to shake off the habit of mental reserve and the well-meaning equivocation it entailed and to come to a decisive break. Aunt Mary's frantic pleas against his proposal to force the issue with his church drew him to Waterford for another bout with her strong will.<sup>73</sup> Her tenacity only intensified his own. He was determined to force the issue with his constrictions; but on what grounds? His mind seems to have recurred to conversations he had had with his brother William, when the latter had visited him in the summer of 1830 and had demurred at taking the communion from Dr. Ripley.<sup>74</sup> William's objections had evidently spurred Waldo to a careful study of the Scripture's records on the subject,<sup>75</sup> and his philosophic objections to the sentimental idolatry of Jesus' person were corroborated by this study, so that he made William's arguments his own. Thereupon, in the first week of June, he addressed a request to the *church* members, many of whom were under the spell of Mr. Ware, to the effect that the Communion Service be celebrated without the elements.<sup>76</sup> The inference is that he would remain as minister should they concede this. Yet at the same time he writes

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<sup>71</sup>"To be genuine! Goethe, they say, was wholly so. The difficulty increases with the gifts of the individual. A ploughboy can be, but a minister, an orator, an ingenious thinker—how hardly!" (*Journals*, II, p. 507).

<sup>72</sup>McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 167. What cryptic and plaintive self-revelation!

<sup>73</sup>*Letters*, I, 353. She wrote him on Feb. 24 (1832) pleading that he remain with the Second Church and "leave a name to be enrolled with the Mathers and Sewalls of that venerable city."

<sup>74</sup>That William had written such a letter of objections to Dr. Ripley is attested by Edward Emerson, *op. cit.*, p. 47. I am informed by all the present owners of Emersoniana, as well as by Professor Rusk, that the letter seems lost. Its contents, however, appear to resemble closely Emerson's sermon on the subject of Sept. 9, 1832, *Miscellanies*, p. 3. (Vol. II, *Works*, ed. of 1903-4).

<sup>75</sup>*Journals*, II, p. 309 (Sept. 10, 1830).

<sup>76</sup>The letter to the church is apparently lost. *Letters*, I, 255,



in his *Journal* that "the profession is antiquated."<sup>77</sup> Three questions arise: (1) Did he make this proposal in good faith, intending to remain at his post if it were accepted? (2) Did he have some hope that the *Society*, especially the younger members, would support his position and put a pressure upon the the Ware-ites in the *Church* to yield? (3) Did his criticism of the ministry apply only to the case of the Second Church where the *church*, always the more sentimentally Christocentric, dominated the situation? Unless either (2) or (3) or both can be affirmed, Emerson must be held guilty of bad faith, arising undoubtedly from his own inner confusion. For he never discloses any serious regret at leaving the Second Church;<sup>78</sup> yet in his letter requesting dismissal he declares "nor do I think less of the office of a Christian minister. . . . I am pained at the situation in which I find myself that compels me to make a difference of opinion of no greater importance the occasion of surrendering so many and so valuable functions as belong to that office."<sup>79</sup> It was probably not the ministry in general Emer-

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<sup>77</sup>*Journals*, II, p. 491 (June 2, 1832). "I have sometimes thought, in order to be a good minister, it was necessary to quit the ministry. The profession is antiquated. In an altered age we worship in the dead forms of our forefathers. Were not a Socratic paganism better than an effete, superannuated Christianity?" Then, with characteristic awareness of genius and high destiny he adds: "A week of moral excitement. Is it years and nations that guide my pen?"

<sup>78</sup>To Aunt Mary he wrote (August 19, 1832): "I apprehend a separation. This, though good nature and prudence condemn and possibly something else better than both, yet promises me much contentment and not the less opportunity of usefulness in the very partial and peculiar channel in which I must be useful if at all. I can only do my work well by abjuring the opinions and customs of all others and adhering strictly to the divine plan, a few dim inches of whose outline I faintly discern in my own breast. Is not that German enow? How gay and glorious the prospect looks. . . ." (*Letters*, I, p. 353). To William he wrote (Nov. 19, 1832): "The severing of the strained cord that bound me to the church is a natural relief. I walk firmly toward a peace and freedom which I plainly see before me, albeit far." (*Ibid.*, p. 357).

<sup>79</sup>*Letters*, I, p. 355 (Sept. 11, 1832). His esoteric conception of Christianity, and his private purpose to advance Ethical Theism as its essential principle are hinted in the next sentences: "I have the same respect for the great objects of the Christian ministry and the same faith in their gradual accomplishment through human means which at first led me to enter it. I should be unfaithful to myself if any change of circumstances could diminish my devotion to the cause of divine truth." This idea of preaching and promoting Ethical Theism through the medium of a Christian pulpit may have been suggested to him first by William Emerson, who had just such counsel given him by Goethe. The idea, which may have been Murat's reason for inviting Emerson to start a Unitarian church in Tallahassee, might well have been argued by William when Emerson visited him on his northbound trip in the spring of 1827, whence

son intended leaving, but the ministry of the Ware-dominated Second Church. This Christocentric domination he had hoped to transmute into a Theocentric attitude, especially on the part of the younger members. But they were not steadfast enough, or substantial enough, to carry the day, and Emerson was too magnanimous to endanger dividing the Church by any aggressive participation in the struggle, which went on through the summer of 1832, not only in the congregation but in the Emerson household and even in Waldo's own mind.<sup>80</sup>

That the desire for literary achievement, for rhetorical distinction was a consular motive there is ample proof.<sup>81</sup> That freedom for the preaching and teaching of a forthright "scientific" ethical Theism, interpreted to the elements of personalist feeling in human nature through the doctrine of the Over-Soul,<sup>82</sup> was more avowedly his objective there can be no doubt. He gave up an assured posi-

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Emerson's policy of accommodation from that time till 1831-2. In purport but not in content, the idea rimed with Aunt Mary's dream that Emerson should be a "new Prometheus" of religion. The writer is convinced that the influence of brother William, quiet, steady, thoughtful and unquestionably sincere, was a more powerful factor in Waldo's development than has yet been acknowledged. In a real sense, it was William versus Aunt Mary after 1825-6; and in 1838 it was William alone who approved the Divinity School Address; Uncle Samuel Ripley was pained, Aunt Mary was alienated.

<sup>80</sup>See *Letters*, I, p. 353. New light is shed by letters from Charles to William, from which the following excerpts are taken: People at home are "engaged in discussing his lately-declared views of the Lord's Supper. . . . He will preach to his *Society* (to them he has not hitherto mentioned the matter publicly, only to the *Church*) his opinions and will probably afterward ask for a dismission—this will bring things to a legal issue . . . a week ago Waldo preached his opinions to his people—it was a crowded house—a noble sermon . . . if the Parish were to be polled probably  $\frac{3}{4}$  would be for keeping their minister on his own terms but this will not be done because certain of the most influential men in church and society adhere to the ordinance and would thereby be grieved and sent away . . . he behaves magnanimously to the bone . . . I think he will gather a parish of his own by and by. . . . (p. 356) "Waldo's parish committee are still in session, considering ways and means of keeping their minister, if may be, without dismembering their church . . . George Emerson and Dr. Ware urged the people to this dissolution . . . many stayed at home rather than vote . . . Waldo looks very sad . . . his attachment seems the stronger when the bonds of it are just dropped. . . ."

<sup>81</sup>"Let me not bury my talent in the earth . . ." (*Journals*, II, p. 496, July 15, 1832). "That the soul of man should speak out is essential to all eloquence, all originality." (*Letters*, I, 358, Nov. 19, 1832)

<sup>82</sup>A cognate if not an equivalent of the Johannine Logos-Christ, as Emerson was becoming aware by November 1832. This correlation of the Over-Soul and the Logos he never seems to have recognized, yet frequent references to the coming Teacher, (1833-38) are revealing. (E. P. Peabody in *The Genius of Emerson*, p. 151).



tion and income not only to win his own integrity, to end his long, enfeebling inner conflict, to be himself and not Aunt Mary or Dr. Ware or even his dead father, to seek freer and more congenial opportunity for his rhetorical ability, but also to redeem the young people of his time<sup>83</sup> from materialism and sensuality, from intellectual and moral stagnation and anglophile psittachism, even from agnosticism or atheism, by a new American religion, yet the oldest of all, the "first philosophy."<sup>84</sup> These views and purposes he gave his congregation in his last sermon as their minister, "The Genuine Man," (October 21, 1832) on the text "Stand therefore . . . the new man which, after God is created in righteousness and true holiness": "This man has the generosity of spirit to give himself up to the guidance of God . . . his heart beats pulse for pulse with the heart of the universe . . . he is distinguished by the heartiness with which he gives himself up to the affairs that engage his attention . . . he has nothing to do with consequences, God will take care of the issues . . . this worth of character is identical with a religious life, the direct revelation of your Maker's will, not written in books many ages since, nor attested by distant miracles. . . ."

The Sermon is, of course, Emerson's ideal of his own free self and of the new way of the Over-Soul. But if it was his last appeal for endorsement, it was futile. On the following Sunday the proprietors voted 30 to 20 against retaining "a genuine man" as their minister.

Thus was the long inner contention resolved of which he had written so feelingly in "The Genuine Man" and then, perhaps before delivery, had scratched out: "Long and weary road that lies before him! Painful, perhaps frightful convulsions that he must suffer before the twilight of that inner day can dawn upon his understanding."<sup>85</sup> Emerson, again in precarious health, went out

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<sup>83</sup>Cf. Letter to Abiel Adams of the Second Church, *Letters*, I, p. 385. Also Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>84</sup>Cf. *Journals*, II, p. 516 (October 1, 1832): "Has the doctrine ever been fairly preached of man's moral nature? Nobody teaches the essential truth, the heart of Christianity for fear of shocking."

<sup>85</sup>McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 255. Another sentence, also crossed off, reads: "It is counted a small thing to ignore the truth, or to sacrifice a scruple of conscience to the opinion and practice of all society or to the obvious need of getting decent livelihood. Yet it is to sacrifice the truth for a mess of pottage." To what extent had the economic stringencies of the hard years past been an argument for unguineness?

beyond the camp without any immediate financial resources save the generosity of his friends in the congregation and of his ever loyal uncle, Samuel Ripley of Waltham. It was even necessary for his Mother to sell all the parsonage furnishings at public auction. His future as minister or author seemed, for the present, to be dubious to all save himself. The evening of October 28 when he laconically recorded the vote of the proprietors in his Journal was the highest moral moment of his life. A fitting quotation from his idolized Milton follows: "He who would write heroic poems should make his whole life an heroic poem."<sup>88</sup>

But now there could be no more accommodation! Not with Landor or Coleridge or Wordsworth!<sup>87</sup> Not with the New Bedford church, which would have called him in 1833 had he not added to his rejection of the Supper his refusal to be bound to pray publicly, regularly and formally.<sup>88</sup> Not with the "tyrants of the Cambridge Parnassus,"<sup>89</sup> Professors Norton and Ware, on the occasion of the Divinity School Address (1838). Nor with domineering Aunt Mary who regarded the address as inspired by "a malignant demon" and disowned him.<sup>90</sup> Nor even with staunch, generous Uncle Samuel Ripley, Unitarian minister at Waltham, who besought him not to publish the Address lest "his name be linked with Volney, Kneeland and Paine!"<sup>91</sup> Yet why should it not be? By 1841, as every one of the intensely autobiographical essays testifies, Emerson was a clear-cut critic of doctrinal, ecclesiastical Christianity; but always mystically, evangelically ethical.<sup>92</sup> Struggling

<sup>88</sup>*Journals*, II, p. 525. Adapted from the Apology to Smeectymnuus.

<sup>87</sup>His old mentors, whom he visited on his European tour (December 1832-October 1833) and found disappointing—even Carlyle! "Especially are they all deficient, these four, in insight into religious truth." (*Journals*, II, p. 78, Sept. 1, 1833).

<sup>88</sup>*Letters*, I, p. 401, McGiffert, p. 255. Cabot, *Memoir*, I, 215.

<sup>89</sup>Emerson's own words, Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 135 (Sept. 5, 1838).

<sup>90</sup>*Letters*, II, p. 149 (July, 1838).

<sup>91</sup>(*Letters*, *ibid.*) Abner Kneeland, Deistic lecturer in Boston and at that time under indictment for blasphemy, read the Divinity School Address to His Society of Freethinkers "as the most instructive discourse he could give them." (*ibid.*) Emerson's sympathy with Kneeland appears plainly in Sermon 123 (not published by Dr. McGiffert).

<sup>92</sup>This polemic is marked in every essay save those on Love, Friendship and Art. In 1833 (Paris, July 11, Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 74) he wrote: "I feel myself pledged, if health and opportunity be granted me, to demonstrate that all necessary truth is its own evidence; that no doctrine of God need appeal to a book; that Christianity is wrongly conceived by all such as take it for a system of doctrines—its stress being upon moral truth. It is a rule of life not a rule of faith."



with its bonds made him a genuine man: honest with himself, a master of circumstances, a national oracle, a compeer of Socrates and Plutarch, Montaigne and Bacon, Goethe and Carlyle. The "long and weary road" had made him "God's freeman"<sup>83</sup> in mind, conscience and literary genius:

"Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself and you shall have the suffrage of the universe."

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<sup>83</sup>His own phrase in a letter to Aunt Mary, May, 1833, (*Letters*, I, p. 149, July, 1838).

## Wanted: A Liberal Revival

L. A. GARRARD

For a number of years now, and especially since the beginning of the great economic crisis, there have been signs of a limited but real revival of religion among the English-speaking peoples. The Report of the Anglican Commission on Doctrine (published in 1938), contained a brief allusion to the change when it pointed out one respect in which the tide seemed to have turned; thoughtful Christians were beginning to ask once again, not whether people could still be expected to believe in Christianity, the problem with which our fathers were so greatly occupied, but how they were to be won for it. If this change of emphasis meant merely that the orthodox churches were turning their back on the whole intellectual side of religion, it would, of course, be a sign of weakness rather than of strength. But that is not true, or at any rate not the whole truth. It is orthodox rather than liberal Christianity that has made the comeback, and orthodoxy seems to be attracting (at any rate in England) most of the best religious brains. That is why the situation seems to me to call for careful examination.

No doubt there are many who feel that the Liberals were over-intellectualistic and inclined to dissolve religion into philosophy. Some time ago a striking article by a Canadian minister appeared in *The Christian World* with the challenging title, "We were once Liberals." The writer, a young man at the beginning of the century, had been one of those who enthusiastically took up with the so-called New Theology movement. Today he still accepts the results of the Nineteenth Century critics in biblical matters and also the philosophical position which made it possible for theologians and scientists to come to an understanding. His intellectual position has not changed; what has changed is simply the emphasis. He now feels that all this was true, but comparatively unimportant. Liberal theology was all right as far as it went, but it concerned itself with things on the periphery of religion, the mere luxuries, so to speak, while the core of the thing was gradually disappearing. Liberalism is all right in good times, when we can afford to occupy ourselves with details, but it is not good enough when the ship is sinking.

Now this criticism, though typical, is not altogether valid. In some respects it goes too far, in others not far enough. It is going too far when it suggests that critical results which affect, say, the historicity of Jesus, or the field of the relations between religion and science, are of minor importance to religion. It does not go far enough in so far as it holds that everything that was held by Liberals in their heyday at the beginning of the century was true. We can now see that they were not as critical as they thought they were. There is, for instance, truth in Tyrrell's famous criticism of Harnack: "The Christ that Harnack sees looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well." Again, Liberalism was right in taking science seriously, but it took some scientists too seriously, and gave away too much to what was not science at all but merely a one-sided philosophy that suited many scientists. Worse still, it was only with some sciences that it made terms. In particular, it was not very successful in accommodating itself to the new psychology. With every allowance for exaggeration in Freud and his followers, and for the complete inadequacy of their philosophy, we shall never go back to the *status quo*. They really have knocked the bottom out of the old optimistic anthropology and the doctrine of automatic progress onward and upward for ever and ever. No doubt one day the pendulum will swing back to some extent, but the half-truth to which we have so pathetically clung is entirely out of fashion today, and our constant claim to be religious progressives makes us particularly reluctant to be left behind the fashion.

Everything seems set, in fact, for a come-back of orthodoxy, in alliance with certain sciences. Even the war, which, in England at any rate, has on the whole had a favourable effect on attendance at church, is likely in the long run to encourage moderate authoritarianism. There is a great deal of disillusionment with human nature which is certainly not all that the more optimistic Liberals have been wont to proclaim. Most people would welcome the return of any form of religion that they were convinced would effect a real regeneration of human nature, and it is the authoritarian systems that claim most in this direction. A sufficiently long time has elapsed since they were last in a really dominant position for men to have forgotten that both the Catholic priesthood and the Protestant dogmatist had their run, and were no



more successful than the Liberals of the last generation in regenerating mankind. However, if this is what people want, we must either do something to satisfy them, or divert this desire to some channels where we can satisfy it by other means. Otherwise there would be nothing left but to keep existing somehow until people turned to us once more for our help in unseating the priest and the dogmatist. And by that time it is probable that they will not stop to listen to us but will repudiate religion neck and crop, ourselves included.

In this situation I can see only one thing to save us from perpetual oscillation between two equally undesirable extremes, and that is a Liberal Revival. First we shall have to get rid of the elements in our intellectual position which are a mere relic of the Nineteenth Century outlook, and make a vigorous attempt to find and to assert the truth and the whole truth in a genuinely balanced statement. That is a difficult, and perhaps a thankless task, but one that badly needs to be undertaken. Secondly we have to show, as I am sure we can show, that interest in the intellectual side of religion does not necessarily mean the starvation of every other side.

There is plenty of evidence that people want a religion. Most of them, and certainly the best of them, would rather have a sensible and critical religion than a superstitious one. Why, then, do they not come to us? In many cases, perhaps, because they have never heard of us. We are certainly not so widely known as we were in the last century, when we did have a certain preeminence both on the intellectual and on the ethical side. You could count upon it that a Unitarian was a thinking man with an independent mind and a highly developed social conscience. Nowadays we have lost a good deal of this preeminence and have replaced it with a painfully self-conscious desire to be progressive, which is apt to result either in taking up with the latest and silliest fad or else in repeating war-cries that were progressive when we were adolescents.

Supposing this could be reformed, and we could once more become known as independent minds with an utter devotion to the truth that cuts right across party loyalties, should we then present a wholly attractive picture to the seeker after religion? Unless certain other changes followed, I am afraid we should not. I remember a story that seems to me symptomatic. An old lady

remarked to her minister, "They say some hard things about Unitarians, and I dare say some of them are true. But there's one thing they can't say: they can't say that any Unitarian ever died of religious mania."

Accordingly, from time to time a movement arises for paying more attention to the devotional life. Such a movement has recently started among our churches in England. There is always a considerable amount of *Laissez-faire* opposition, on the ground that this sort of thing is contrary to our ethos, but there are some who are prepared to persist in seeking for ways of enriching and widening the religious life of the churches, and even to face the taunt that it is only a clique of "Holy Joes" who want it. Any minister who is worth his salt will treat this objection with the contempt it deserves, confident that if there is one thing of which Liberals are in no danger, it is falling into mere pietism. The important thing is to make it plain that there is room for variety of emphasis. We do not want those who have no special inclination for this kind of thing to come in merely for fear of being left out of something, but at the same time we need to be very careful not to affect any superiority towards them. It is ridiculous to be intolerant towards another man because he is not as interested as we are either in studying the mystics or in preaching the social gospel, as the case may be. Ideally the two things should go together, but when they do not it would be fatal to try to force an interest that is not genuinely felt.

Nevertheless, such a movement does have its dangers. Much as we should welcome any revival of interest in the spiritual life, and valuable as a study of its technique is, it would be a mistake to expect too much of this, because it is starting at the wrong end. Spiritual deadness is a symptom rather than the disease itself. Until we have made up our minds on the real purpose of our existence as a group, we shall never get very far by studying means of deepening the devotional life. We may indeed concede to the critics that there is something rather unhealthy in paying too much attention to our own spiritual condition. That, I take it, is what we mean when we speak of religiosity; and religiosity is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing. What is primarily wrong with it is that it proceeds from scepticism. It is the religious counterpart of the philosophical heresy of subjective idealism, the idea that when you have lost all certainty about the outside world

you can get it back again by considering the states of your own mind. The only way to avoid it is to insist emphatically on the reality of what is outside; and in religion that means on the transcendence of God. We must emphasize the object of religious devotion; faith and the spiritual life must go hand in hand.

On one point we must expect a large amount of variety. Some of us need the feeling that we have our roots in history and that a certain religious tradition stands behind us. Our religious life is bound up with Christianity, and we believe that Christianity, which has been a highly syncretistic religion, can easily be stretched to comprehend all that is ultimately valuable in other faiths. Others are able to do without such a tradition, and feel it as an incubus. For that reason I think it would be a mistake to insist too strongly on the necessity of accepting the Christian framework. Some of us could not live without it, and anyone who gives it up will lose something. Eclecticism is never ultimately satisfactory, and there are some people who (if I may alter a famous judgment on Byron) think themselves good universalists, but are only shockingly bad Christians. We must allow, then, that for our Liberal Revival Christianity may be regarded as a non-essential. The revival must not be identified with any form of Christianity, though it must be capable of being related to it.

There is one thing, however, upon which we cannot insist too strongly. It is probable that some exclusiveness is always necessary in every religious body, or indeed in any body that exists for a specific purpose. Exclusiveness is quite a different thing from intolerance; we may rejoice that people exist in other camps whose presence in our own would be a nuisance. Nobody but a complete antinomian doubts that some exclusiveness is necessary as regards conduct. No religious body would welcome the adherence of every unrepentant scoundrel, or even of every sincere man who might find its membership a convenience for the propagation of some creed of his own. As regards belief there is more doubt, but I think it follows that some exclusiveness is reasonable even there. The one type of exclusiveness for which there is nothing whatever to be said is that which would keep out certain varieties of religious temperament. If a denomination appealed only to mystics or to social reformers and had nothing to offer to anybody else, it would be, to say the least of it, hopelessly lop-sided. As a matter of fact Methodism has only avoided this mistake by interpreting



the type of experience on which it theoretically insists so liberally that any man who seeks to worship God at all is permitted to count himself converted.

Now I am afraid that this is one of the points at which we tend to fall short of the ideal. It is not, of course, that we insist too strongly on conversion but that we are inclined to be contemptuous of it. It is a matter worthy of serious consideration whether Liberalism has anything to offer the man of acutely twice-born temperament, the man who believes that he is a sinner and is not going to accept any religion in which the sense of sin is explained away. It would not be necessary to turn our services into revival meetings or our churches into a Salvation Army in order to meet what is surely a genuine religious need.

Moreover, this kind of problem is more serious for us than for most other religious bodies. Nowhere else does so much depend upon the individual minister. Where you have a Bible which contains in all its parts the Word of God and a liturgy which is in regular use, there is a far better chance that justice will be done to every religious mood than where services and reading as well as sermon are left entirely to the discretion of one man. Of course, every good minister knows that a service is something more than the expression of his own personality; but it is by no means easy to see how a man is to satisfy all the wants of his flock (especially if it be a varied and heterogeneous flock, such as we should pray for) without being untrue to himself. Our Liberal Revival must somehow contrive to combine Liberal (or at any rate true) theology with a religion that satisfies the sinner and the mystic. This is no easy thing. In point of fact it is unlikely that we shall ever get a true theology unless we are willing to learn from every type of religious experience. Here indeed we have a kind of circle. A true theology depends upon a wide and deep religious experience, while what we experience is largely moulded by what we believe. At any rate we shall need, as a preliminary to a revival, to examine our religion in both respects and to ask ourselves whether we are satisfied both with our religious experience and with our theology. If not, we must ask what it is that is preventing us from enjoying a full experience and from constructing a true theology.

Let us face the former question first. What is standing in the way of a more complete and satisfying experience? Most of the

chief factors have already been touched upon and I shall not attempt to elaborate an answer here. Among these factors are a narrowness (and that means an error) in our theology, a fear of emotionalism which is not without justification but can be restrictive, and an over-emphasis on the ethical and social side of religion to the exclusion of every other. It is so easy to go for the way that produces the quickest and most spectacular results; but it is seldom realised that an activist religion may in its own way be just as much a form of escape, especially escape from thinking, as any mysticism.

As regards the second question, I believe that the fundamental cause of what is false and narrow in Liberal theology has been a mistaken view of freedom, turning it into something for which it is not fitted, an end in itself. There has been, I believe, some extraordinarily loose thinking in Liberal circles on this matter of freedom. Perhaps I can best illustrate the kind of confusion of which I am thinking by relating an incident that took place at Oxford University. A certain student had written a thesis on the subject of Modernism. His examiners, by a very fair arrangement, were the leading Modernist theologian in this country and an eminent Anglo-Catholic. At the *viva voce* the latter started the proceedings with the question, "Would you say that Modernism was an attitude of mind or a body of dogma?" "I should say that it was an attitude of mind," was the man's natural reply. "Then supposing that a man was led by this attitude of mind to conclude that the complete and final truth about the nature of Christ was comprehended in the definitions of Chalcedon, would you call such a man a Modernist?" This subtle but by no means unanswerable question was too much for the unhappy student, who hastened to confess that after all Modernism must be a body of dogma. Now we think we know which of these two things Liberalism is. But we might do well to apply a simple test of the genuineness of our conviction. It is to ask ourselves whether we think of orthodoxy as an attitude of mind or as a body of dogma. I will not say which answer is correct. But of this I am sure: if we are going to use the name orthodox as a term of abuse, then we must certainly restrict it to the attitude of mind. To call an opinion orthodox is to say nothing whatever about its truth, but only that most people accept it as true. To attack a belief or statement on the ground that it is orthodox is not only to give an argument which

is no argument, it is to show that your own attitude of mind is controlled by precisely that prejudice which makes orthodoxy, when viewed as an attitude of mind, objectionable. This is not mere hair-splitting, for we all know that one of the easiest ways of raising a cheer at a Liberal gathering is to attack the orthodox churches.

I return in conclusion to the point that seems to me to be of paramount importance. It is that we shall try to show, as I am sure we can show, that interest in the intellectual side of religion does not necessarily mean the starvation of every other side. It has been the great misfortune of Christianity in recent times that evangelism, the seeking of souls, has been left to men whose gifts have been wholly of the heart and not of the head. God, who will not force anyone to his service, has made use of what material he had for the task of redemption. But when all is said and done, his supreme ministers in the Christian tradition have been men who served with their mind as well as with their body. Jesus himself, Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Wesley were not ignorant ranters; they were men of intellect, even college professors. I will not say that they were all Liberals in their day, though in their main emphasis they all brought liberalism in some form. But we know that neither truth nor the love of men can flourish for long in any other atmosphere but that of freedom. It is clear that the type of man that we most need today is the man of fine mental equipment whose love for truth is balanced by his love for men and his desire to draw them to God, the man who has seen the vision of God and his purpose, and who cannot but speak the things that he has seen and heard. God grant that such men may arise in our midst and bring that Liberal Revival which the world so desperately needs!



## Idols or God?

HORACE S. FRIES

Merely a casual survey of articles by religious liberals reveals that the God of liberal religion has become Science. It would be unfortunate to substitute for this idol the God of illiberal religions. But if we are to worship Science as God, it is imperative that we try to see what is meant by "Science." Even the devil can assume a divine garb.

In the pervasive conflict which characterizes our intellectual and social struggles nowadays one of the chief arguments by apologists for both religion and science is that science, being ethically neutral, cannot be opposed to religion which must be ethically concerned. A strange reading of the facts, indeed, is at the basis of this argument from either side of the contest. Observation for the purpose of description rather than for apologetics suggests all too clearly that practically, pragmatically, religion is ethically neutral and that science might almost be re-spelled as "Satan."

Yet at the heart of all the gods which men have invented is the underlying longing to create a happier dwelling place for the human family. And this longing lies at the heart of our worship of the false Science. For science is easily seen to be the most powerful instrument which man has created for the deliberate reconstruction of his environment. Literally it moveth mountains. And men still have faith—fortunately—that they may yet learn how to use this powerful instrument for human ends.

It is passing strange that we do not see the contradiction here. For what human instrument is there as powerful as science for instituting deliberate control of the use of science? But science, by definition if ethically neutral, cannot possibly tell us to what ends to employ science for the enrichment of life—not even for the preservation of life. Yet the essence of our modern problem is how to use this powerful, dangerous instrument.

It is high time for religion, strong or weak, to concentrate its efforts *against* science. The last word is used without quotation marks. "Science," of course, "properly" conceived, is not false—again by definition. But what religious leaders and what scientists—outside a few venturesome and unorthodox economists, political scientists, and public administrators—are trying to recon-

ceive, to recontruct, science? And science as conceived and widely practiced today is clearly false. Religious leaders should be the first to recognize this fact, for the devil has long been well pleased with neutrality.

There is no theoretical justification for the notion that science is neutral. The purported dualism between science and value which Descartes and Bacon injected into the idea of science may well have served an important need at the painful nativity of science when the then powerful church was the militant and jealous guardian of human values. But the perpetuation of this dualism is vicious. Scientists are no longer in danger of either Protestant or Catholic inquisition. There is a certain painful note of poetic justice in the contemporary fact that science, the institution, is in grave danger at the hands of the unscientifically conceived state—at the hands of the state conceived as a religious object or as a metaphysical entity.

This dualism today serves only to increase the dangers to science. By means of it, the nature sciences can claim exemption from responsibility for the social consequences of their discoveries. By means of it, the social sciences, in envious emulation of the nature sciences, can claim exemption from responsibility for the same consequences. Both militantly demand a continuation of their freedom when, as a matter of fact, both are enslaved unknowingly by the industrial cultural patterns which blindly determine the prevailing research problems of the one and the pathetic academicism of the other. Freedom for science will be won only when it tries to determine its own direction by critical participation in these cultural forces. To do this science must accept responsibility for its own effects in society. When, rarely enough, the nature sciences become conscious of their neglect, they turn the task over to the social sciences, being careful to make a sharp theoretical distinction between social and nature studies. The social sciences, to remain science, that is, to remain ethically neutral, must then turn the job over to "education" and proceed to laugh at the "educators," or to religion and proceed to undermine the church.

Quite the contrary! There is every practical reason and there are good theoretical reasons for holding that science is not a stranger to value, that its course steers far from ethical neutrality. For once ethical responsibility is assumed by science, and not until it is assumed, can there be a scientific attack on the problem of

how to use science. Need it be said that to this end the church—unless paradoxically it is to be subsumed under science—must turn its theoretical claim to ethical responsibility over to science? Perhaps this is the cross the church must now bear. But more than this, the church should bring all its pressure against the false science to bring it to acceptance of this new and humbling responsibility—if the church is to serve men and thereby any true gods there be.

The theoretical justification of the claim that science does incorporate value is not complex or abstruse. Indeed it can be denied only on the assumption that value is something which must be revealed antecedently to a search for it. For almost every step in a scientific experiment involves the act of evaluation. That the scientist does not employ a fixed, antecedent standard to which he tries to make his evaluations conform is the merit of scientific procedure. But that he does come to tentative agreements with other scientists on ideas, hypotheses, and methods, for the purpose of putting them to work, testing them, and, at last, discarding them (in the form of obsolete theories) for entirely new and more effective hypotheses; this is also the merit and essence of science.

Galileo went down to the shipyards. Experimental science was born in the travail of physical operations, activities; from the womb of the practical arts. We cannot hope for a social science until other scientists besides J. R. Commons, F. W. Taylor, and a few other great names—with many lesser names no less noble—go down to the market place and into the arena of public administration. And this will not happen as long as social science, to be "Science," must claim ethical neutrality, and must submit to a theoretical distinction between it and the nature sciences.

Neither the findings nor the methods of science are neutral. Science is not neutral in the physical laboratory and it cannot be neutral in our social institutions, its social laboratory. But it can agree tentatively on social plans, it can set these plans to work as hypotheses in our social institutions to try them out, to modify them, and to supplant them, in the form of obsolete social theories, with better plans. And it can—to be successful it must—do this democratically. Adequate control of social conditions for scientific purposes is doubtless difficult to achieve. But how difficult or how easy such control will be will not be known until it is tried.



Control of many physical conditions was, and is, difficult in the nature sciences. But social control, however simple or complex it turns out to be, must be won through *participation* of the elements, the human beings involved. Empirical evidence from the T. V. A. and the A. A. A. and a few other ventures, indicates clearly that participation and thus democratic social scientific control is not impossible of attainment.

If the church has any task today besides the preservation of its own vested interests, it is to help reconstruct science, to get rid of the false idea that science is ethically neutral and to replace the ethical asocial aspects of science and its neglect of consequences with the kind of ethical concern shown in the laboratory: the concern to put relevant ideas to work for the purpose of improving them. If science does not save itself, it cannot be saved. But to be saved it must recognize its subordinate position within the human venture. It cannot dictate to life, but there is still hope that it can save life and serve it more abundantly.

## What Is Left of Christianity?

JAY WILLIAM HUDSON

It is high time honestly and fearlessly to ask ourselves whether anything vital is left of Christianity; and, if so, what?

First of all, such Christianity as is based upon miracles tends to be abandoned by most intelligent men. If Christianity means the creation of man and the world by a god out of nothing but his will; the virgin birth of Jesus; the turning of water into wine entirely apart from known chemical processes; the resurrection of a dead Christ from his sepulchre and his ascension and disappearance into the sky, then Christianity is utterly incompatible with the working hypotheses of every reputable scientific investigator of our time. For a miracle is a breach of the law of universal causation; or, at the least, of the law of the uniformity of nature, without the assumption of which science can not well proceed. Science may or may not be correct in this, her fundamental working hypothesis; but she is not likely to be dislodged from it. Her successes under its auspices have been too vast and spectacular. Christianity can repudiate science if it cares to: but in repudiating it, it inevitably alienates the best minds of today, besides ignoring a logic with which it must come to terms sooner or later. The day of reckoning is upon us. If Christianity has a better logic than the logic of science, it must prove it forthwith, or abandon all its faiths so far as they rely upon miracles.

But if the miracles have to go, what, then, *is* left of Christianity?

My own opinion is that miracles have never been of any great value to what is fundamentally vital to the Christian faiths. Christianity can relinquish them without losing an iota of its real worth. This seems paradoxical: but let us look at the matter without prejudice.

What are the salient faiths of the Christian religion? How far do they answer the modern temper and the modern need, even without miracles to support them?

We must first understand the prevailing modern conception of the moral order. For, in my opinion, a vital religion for our times exists and justifies itself by its ability to make that moral order valiantly possible.

It is obvious to anyone who has studied the modern temper that we have radically changed our traditional conception of morals. We have definitely shifted from the notion that what is right is

determined by a rigid code of rules to quite another conception: that right is a matter of what ought to be done if we are expertly to achieve the true goal of human self-realization. And this fulfillment of ourselves, this carrying out of the best that is in us, means at least three things: First, the total self-realization of all our capacities and powers so far as this is possible. Second, a life with our fellows, not an isolated life, but a life full of what only social co-operation can give. And, third, a life which has no assignable limits to its possibilities. This, it seems to me, is the scant minimum of what the modern temper demands of living.

Now, what specific beliefs about man and his universe does all this involve? That is, if we are to be logically true to the moral order as we moderns conceive it?

Clearly, there is involved, first of all, a belief in some definition of what is meant by an ideal human person: for this is the goal, yes, and the criterion of the success of all our struggles.

Second, there is involved a belief that the universe is of such a character as to make the moral enterprise reasonably possible, either in this life, or in a life beyond the death of the body.

How far are these necessary beliefs Christian?

We must decide what we are to mean by Christianity. There are many differing versions. The Protestant has a version which differs from that of the Roman Catholic. Each denomination of Protestantism has a different point of view: that is, indeed, the only valid reason for their separate being.

I shall mean by Christianity that large Christianity common to all sects of Protestants, from Fundamentalists to Liberals, ignoring their differences; further, I shall mean the beliefs common to both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic churches. Surely, this is the only fair thing to mean, if we are not to intrude, for personal reasons, some special and exclusive brand of Christianity. I cannot presume to settle the many differences between Christians. I shall deal only with the affirmations common to the Christian church universal.

It is my conviction that the beliefs about man and his world required by the modern conception of the moral order are uniquely, effectively, and adequately provided by what is common in the Christian faiths.

First, the demand for a clear definition of the ideal person is answered by the Christian conception of God. His attributes are



exactly those we seek to realize in ourselves so far as we can: the perfection of wisdom, of beauty, of goodness, and of power. "Nearer, my God, to Thee" is not merely a religious aspiration, but the heart of all of our ethical strivings. But this is not all. The demand for a more concrete delineation of the ideal of our human personality is abundantly given by Christianity's Christ. Neither this God nor this Christ, purified of useless miracles, contradicts a single syllable of science's legitimate pronouncements. Any scientist can be true to his laboratory technique and still, without any inconsistency, share in Cardinal Newman's famous hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light." For the light of Christianity's God and her Christ does not at all conflict with the light of science: it only intensifies it by giving science an ultimate meaning and use.

Second, the demand for the belief that the world is such that the triumph of righteousness is reasonably possible is answered by the Christian solution of the problem of evil: the faith that, in spite of all apparent defeats, "all things work together for good," so far as we are unswervingly loyal to the ideal of all good. There is nothing in such a faith which involves a miracle or which challenges science: indeed, such a faith is utterly beyond science's verdict, one way or the other. There is nothing inconsistent for even a scientist to affirm, not as a scientist, but as a man, that "sometimes gleams upon our sight, through present wrong, the eternal right, and step by step, since time began, we see the steady gain of man." Much of which gain, by the way, is due to science itself!

The necessity for the belief that the universe is such as to make the moral quest possible is further met by the Christian conception of immortality as a chance for everlasting progress. The modern demand for measureless self-fulfillment here finds its perfect and completed answer. There is nothing here to call for miracles or to nullify modern science, despite the popular impression that "science disproves immortality." For the only immortality science disproves is the immortality of the body. The only death science deals with is biological death. No science, whether physical, chemical, or biological, is remotely concerned with the immortality or even the existence of an immaterial soul. Science has no verdict to offer here. But if such a belief is necessary for the moral adventure at its best, any scientist, as a man, can freely and consistently embrace it.

One conspicuous modern demand of any moral goal is that it shall not be selfish, but social. This social nature of the modern ideal is answered by the social institution of the Christian church, which increasingly recognizes the obligation of each man to all men, stressed so insistently by its founder.

*To summarize:* Modern morals needs certain beliefs about man and his universe in order to make the moral quest consistent: to render life as we conceive it rationally possible.

These beliefs are what we mean by the faiths of religion.

These faiths coincide with the fundamental beliefs of Christianity.

What, then, is left of Christianity?

God, as the supreme conception of the ultimate fulfillment of human personality, which ever seeks the perfection of wisdom, of beauty, of goodness, yes, and the power of all these to become progressively triumphant;

Jesus, as the unique and concrete exemplar of this same ideal; a life of priceless value in bringing this ideal intimately close to the lives of men (the greatest thing in Christianity has been and always will be the Christ);

The universe as a place where the moral law is the law supreme over all other laws;

Immortality, as the everlasting chance of carrying on the moral adventure beyond the body's death;

The church, as the organized agency for making these faiths known and socially effective.

What else is left of Christianity for this or that man or sect is a matter of personal or group decision, with which we are not here concerned.

I should like to think that we are about to enter upon a new phase in the history of the Christian church. A phase in which it will no longer merely "adapt" itself to civilization, important as this is, but will *lead* civilization. For its ideals are precisely those for which modern civilization exists and by which its progress is to be assessed.

If the dictators have their way, there will be nothing left of Christianity but a tragic memory. For Christianity and Democracy have identical foundations, the same interpretation of what we human beings really are and what we ought to become. If they triumph, they triumph together. If either fails, both perish.

# The Metaphysical Status of Evil<sup>1</sup>

ALEXANDER WINSTON

Dr. Clarence Skinner's article on the nature of evil, in an earlier issue of this Journal<sup>2</sup> was essentially humanistic in its orientation, and dealt admirably with one phase of the question. But evil is more than a fact in human experience. It characterizes all reality at all times. It presents a metaphysical problem, linked to such ultimate concepts as God, substance, realization and possibility, time, and individuality. The following remarks will be an elaboration of what I mean by the "metaphysical status" of evil.

## I.

First we shall define evil in such a way that the very denial of that definition involves the denier in its acceptance. "By good, as we mortals experience it, we mean something that when it comes or is expected, we actually welcome, try to attain or keep, and regard with content. By evil in general, as it is in our experience, we mean whatever we find in any sense repugnant or intolerable. . . . We mean precisely whatever we regard as something to be gotten rid of, shrunken from, put out of sight, of hearing, of memory, eschewed, expelled, assailed, or otherwise directly or indirectly resisted."<sup>3</sup> Whoever expels, eschews or resists this definition of evil thereby verifies the truth of the definition.

Nor are its terms to be considered only human in connotation. If (1) the world is comprised of organic individuals (as I shall maintain later), and if (2) the characteristic activity of an organism is *selection* (acceptance-rejection), then the world is so constituted as to exhibit acts of rejection at any point in its history.

Next, we must assume existence to be always to some degree a value. This does not mean that the good involved in an existent outweighs the evil in every instance. It simply means that when *anything* is destroyed, *something* of value is lost. The reason is not far to seek: all existence is made possible by evaluations, however rudimentary. If a cruel despot is killed, at least his tailor loses a customer. Survival, then, is the value of values, and the only thing that has absolutely no value is a non-existent.

Further, let us acknowledge that the basic value of survival can-

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<sup>1</sup>This article is largely based upon my Bachelor of Divinity thesis, *The Problem of Evil*, Meadville, 1935.

<sup>2</sup>Autumn, 1939.

<sup>3</sup>Josiah Royce: *Studies of Good and Evil*, p. 18.



not be conceived as applying indiscriminately to all entities. In a world marked by mutual destruction and obstruction of one thing by another, we must have some criterion of higher and lower values.

## II.

Why should there be a "problem" of evil any more than a problem of trees or hydrogen? Empirically there is no difference between the existence of a tree and the existence of evil, but whenever an absolutistic-theistic view of God is held, the problem becomes a logical one. If God includes everything, and "everything" includes evil, why does not God include evil? If A equals B, and B equals C, then A equals C. It was to refute this irrefutable equation that generations of apologists wove their subtle scholastic arguments.

The major solutions offered by monistic theism are, briefly, as follows:

(1) If freedom of choice is to be real, there must be the possibility of choosing evil. It may be pointed out, in refutation, that free choice does not necessarily involve choice between good and evil. We can freely choose between comparative goods, one of which may be preferable, just as we prefer one beautiful color rather than another.

(2) Opposition to evil exercises the moral nature. (We don't mind the exercise, but why add the crushing defeats of our moral nature?)

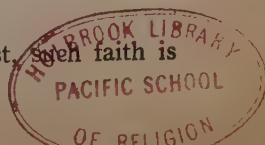
(3) Good is known only by contrast to evil. (Contrast is possible without moral implication. We know red by contrast with blue, but neither red nor blue is evil. Why not create a world marked only by contrasts *within* the order of the good?)

(4) God directly wills evil. (Then there is no problem: the God of goodness and power has become simply the God of power.)

(5) Evil is illusory. (Then it is the illusion which is to be "rejected, shrunk from, expelled." There is no escape from our definition.)

(6) Evil is the absence of the good. Made famous by Plotinus, this theory has survived even in men of great common sense, such as Aquinas, and persists in neo-scholastic thought. (But we find evil as positive and real as good. Further, could we not reply that good is simply the absence of evil?)

(7) Evil is unreal because impermanent. (First, such faith is



an unwarranted dogma; second, evil is evil, no matter how transient.)

(8) Evil is mere ignorance. (Then ignorance is evil, and how did God ever permit ignorance to occur?)

(9) Man brought on all woe to the world. (But evil is metaphysical, existing long before man appeared. And, we ask, why did God's foresight not head off so disastrous an event?)

(10) A minor deity created things imperfectly. (Any court of law would hold the ultimate God responsible.)

(11) It's all a mystery.<sup>4</sup> (Such a solution cuts the Gordian knot of our perplexity and throws the whole discussion out of the court of logic.)

None of the above solutions satisfies us, hence we find the problem still persisting beyond the strenuous efforts of absolutistic theism to dispose of it. The non-theists (atomists, religious humanists) escape the problem completely, but the pessimists find themselves faced with an opposite difficulty—the problem of good.

We turn, finally to three pluralistic hypotheses, of which the first is that of a good spirit versus a bad spirit, or God versus the devil. In other lands, Zoroastrianism and Manicheism promulgated a similar doctrine. This dualism cannot be positively disproved and remains a possible hypothesis.

A more satisfactory dualism is that which reduces evil to a clash between a finite (though entirely good) God and some passive material on which God works. We live in the best of all *possible* worlds, as Leibniz wisely said.<sup>5</sup> Such teaching was also central in Plato's multiform approach to the subject. Of the world's objects he says: "Let us always, in all that we say, hold that God made them as far as possible the fairest and best, out of things that were not fair and good."<sup>6</sup> Like the preceding hypothesis, the Platonic theory is not logically inconsistent and must be accepted or rejected on other grounds.

The most plausible view in modern thought stresses the dualism of organization versus disorganization. Its superiority over the

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<sup>4</sup>Some of the neo-supernaturalists sharply separate God and His finite creation, and refuse to characterize Him by humanly understandable attributes.

<sup>5</sup>Prof. D. C. Macintosh states that this world is the best possible for God at the present level of human existence, though not the best that can be achieved as soon as men do their part in creating a finer order.

<sup>6</sup>*Timaeus*, 53.

Platonic conception lies in its recognition of matter as active rather than passive, dynamic rather than inert. Evil characterizes levels other than the material. On the purely psychological or social level there may be clash and destructive frustration. The resolution of the clash may be the dominance of one factor, or better, compromise, or best, a creative integration. Whichever way we turn, we are presented with a factor involving chaos, frustration—namely, Discord: and a factor involving order, fulfillment—namely, Harmony or God.

To put it in the barest terms, good is that Harmony which enables the maximum of individual fulfillment with the minimum of destructive clash: evil is that destruction and frustration which destroys or prevents Harmony. Whatever contributes to the organization of a functional harmony is good. When an individual inherits its past and unifies it with the possibilities presented by its envisaged future, and when this process of integration is such that a minimum of destruction and frustration takes place, then a maximum of good is present. The amount or intensity of value is in direct proportion to the degree to which the individual unifies itself harmoniously without destroying other individuals or thwarting them, or neutralizing them, or in so far as those evils *are* present, to the degree in which it raises over them the arch of tragic peace and beauty.

### III.

With the rejection of absolutistic theism, the problem of evil ceases to be a logical one for us, and becomes a descriptive one. In this section I shall ask: What is the nature of good as well as evil? What configurations do they show as they arise continuously in the contemporary world?

My general metaphysical theory is this: That the world is made up of individuals, each possessing a set of relationships infinite in number and unimaginable in reach. Some individuals are floating with comparative freedom, such as the gases of the upper atmosphere. Others are grouped in loose aggregates with weak internal relationships. These are the physical objects of the "inanimate" world. Others are joined in protoplasm, unicellular animals, plants, lower animals, men and women. The highly complex individual is a hierarchy of interrelationships. It is a center of energy, capable of affecting the environment, whether immediate or remote, and



capable of being affected in return by the same environment. Its characteristic activity is the grasp of a field of novelty and the organization of that novelty into the routine harmony of the established self. Its good lies in its persistence as an enduring individual, with the balance of routine and novelty appropriate to it at that moment. Its evil lies either in a disrupting novelty, or in the stasis which accompanies the dominance of routine.

Each material atom, for example, is an individual, a center of energy possessing a definite potential, that is, a specific power of acting upon its environment and a specific reaction to its environment. It possesses unity, organization and a routine of internal functioning. It seeks to perpetuate itself in a state of dynamic equilibrium, and when the balance is disturbed, the atom immediately exerts an electronic pull upon the world, seeking to satisfy its deficiency. If the disturbance is disruptive, the atom loses its identity, and "death" ensues. On the other hand, inactivity (partial "death," in so far as that term means cessation of activity) follows as soon as the disequilibrium has been remedied. Stasis, absolute or partial, means absolute or partial death for the atomic individual. Dynamic equilibrium follows a fluctuating life-line between novelty and stasis. Its good consists in the appropriate balance between the two. Its evil consists in an excess of either factor.

The same is true of the physiological, psychological and socio-economic organisms. Walter Cannon<sup>8</sup> calls dynamic bodily equilibrium "homeostasis," and quotes<sup>9</sup> the French physiologist, Charles Richet: "The living being is stable. It must be so in order not to be destroyed, dissolved or disintegrated by the colossal forces, often adverse, which surround it. By an apparent contradiction, it maintains its stability only if it is excitable and capable of modifying itself according to external stimuli and adjusting its response to the stimulation. In a sense it is stable because it is modified—the slight instability is the necessary condition for the true stability of the organism." Cannon proceeds to show how every physiological process exhibits the same fluctuation from novelty to stasis. In like manner, an examination of psychic life shows that the status of affective rest is the end-state of dynamic striving and the purpose

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<sup>8</sup>*The Wisdom of the Body*, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

underlying behavior is the neutralizing of affective disturbance. Consciousness itself is an adaptation of the organism for the purpose of maintaining itself in a state of dynamic equilibrium. The good of the ego lies in its inner peace derived from the sense of an intellectual or moral "growing edge" against a background of harmonious intellectual or moral concepts. Its evil lies in strains off balance—inconsolable grief, phobias, complexes. Its evil lies also in the pious Utopia of perfect bliss, wherein all thought would be gratuitous, or in those "perfections" at a low level which stifle growth. Nor need we look far to see how all socio-economic institutions and practices result from man's desire to maintain himself in his precarious feat of walking the tight-rope between the twin abysses of excessive novelty and excessive routine. As arms and legs and eyes are but adaptations of the organism for more successfully controlling its world and more easily acquiring goods leading to self-preservation, so the economic system and social custom are but forms of adaptation to the same. Economic activity, like all other activity, exists because disequilibrium is either present or imminent. Evil ensues when the smooth functioning of the system is smashed by a disruptive novelty, or when it relapses into a lethargic stasis. An element of surprise (if not shocking to the point of paralysis) stimulates the social organism to activity.

In a world of chaos, of course, the body politic could not exist. Structure, persistence, identity, continuity—these terms indicate the prerequisites of any organization. Likewise, the body politic could not exist in the static bliss-kingdom of pious dreams. Anarchy, not organization, is peculiar to Utopia. We can see that dominance of novelty is a mild form of chaos, and that dominance of routine is a mild form of a popularly-conceived Utopia. If existence is synonymous with organization, then some amount of real evil, however small, is necessary for the existence of the social order.

#### IV.

It has been our aim to investigate the configuration of evil, arriving finally at broad generalizations within whose defining limits all evil might be included. We found the world to consist of organisms, individual centers of energy with a potency for persistence. These centers of energy exist in a world marked by process. The process is constituted by the temporal advance of all individuals

in all relationships. The basic activity of an individual in process is a grasp of a field of novelty and an organization of that novelty into the functional harmony of the established self. The result is a life-line of dynamic equilibrium, a moving peace, which constitutes the good of the particular individual. Its persistence as an enduring self depends upon its appropriate balance of novelty and routine. Evil, for any individual, may be the disturbance of dynamic peace due to an unassimilable degree of newness in the present moment. The unpredictably new may be an overwhelming disruptive factor, ending in the destruction or frustration of the individual. On the other hand, evil may be the partial stasis which results from perfection at a low level at the sacrifice of growth.

Let us ask now: What is the future of evil? Can it be vanquished utterly? It is my contention that evil is an eternal factor in the world, an element "given" from the beginning, and a phase of the process in terms of which alone our world is intelligible. The concept of perfection, if taken seriously, implies an inactivity akin to death. Stasis and life are mutually exclusive terms. Therefore no Utopia nor Nirvana nor Paradise is possible, no absolute perfection is possible: and the Kingdom of God, as an "ideal immovable," is but a dynamic illusion driving men towards a goal, which, strictly speaking, is unattainable. Evil may be diminished, but never eliminated. Whitehead states that "the fact of evil, interwoven with the texture of the world, shows that in the nature of things there remains effectiveness for degradation. . . . The foundation of all understanding of sociological theory—that is to say, of all understanding of human life—is that no static maintenance of perfection is possible. This axiom is rooted in the nature of things."<sup>10</sup> Good is the harmonious system which reduces evil, both by establishing favorable relationships tending to equilibrium in some measure, and by preventing equilibria from becoming static, degenerate. All ideals of unchanging perfection are illusory: life consists of growth and novelty against a background of repetitive harmony. The stable harmony, with its vivid foreground of surprise, constitutes the factor of good which will grow but never triumph. The evil which will never die is the chaos of a disrupted harmony, or the inertness of comparative perfection at a low level.

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<sup>10</sup>*Religion in the Making*, p. 17; *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 354.



## Book Reviews

### BRITISH GENIUS AND HETERODOXY

The work of Principal McLachlan of the Unitarian College, Manchester, in the historiography of Anti-trinitarian Dissent, has been continuously admirable. His studies of the *Methodist Unitarian Movement*, the *Story of a Non-Conformist Library*, the *Letters of Theophilus Lindsey*, the *Unitarian Movement in the Religious Life of England* have crowned with abiding distinction his lifelong service to the cause of free religion. May this present volume be not the last to come from the riches of his many years of study and teaching!<sup>1</sup>

With precise detail, clear exposition, even-tempered yet strenuous argument he has reviewed questions to which hosts of writers have given attention, too often unfactual and prejudiced: (a) Were Milton, Locke and Newton Anti-trinitarian? (b) if so, what were the degree and quality of their heterodoxy? (c) Why did they not publish their views openly while living? So thorough is his review of the known facts, so candid and fair are his decisions that, until new primary source material is unearthed, he has said the last word on this *triune* subject!

His treatment of Milton's religion leads off with a stricture upon Milton by an Anglo-Catholic Donne-worshipper, Lord David Cecil, in *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse*: "Milton was not essentially a religious poet . . . as an exposition of Christian belief, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are failures." Coupling this chrysolite with Belloc's doctrinaire misinterpretations of Milton's motives and views, Dr. McLachlan proceeds to develop the poet's change from the orthodoxy of the *Nativity Ode* (1629) through the waxing anti-Laudianism of *Lycidas* (1639) to his independent convictions on tolerance and church polity (*Reasons for Church Government*, 1641; *Areopagitica*, 1644). By this time Milton had added to the stoic moralism of *Comus* (1637) the Puritan's prophetic wrath against Anglican sacramentalism and ecclesiasticism until "it is doubtful if any non-conformist, at any time, spoke with more vehemence against the Church of England" (p. 9). Influenced probably by Boehme and the Quakers to affirm the Inner Light and the intuitive Moral Law (to which he was pre-disposed by the stoic doctrine of Reason) Milton adhered to no church, but was a Baptist as to baptism, a Quaker as to liturgy and a volunteer ministry, Independent (i.e. Congregationalist) as to church polity and tolerance. Theologically he progressed from Trinitarianism through Sabellianism to Arianism. In his last great poem (*Samson Agonistes*, 1671) he indicates his disapproval of vicarious, sacrificial atonement, while cer-

<sup>1</sup>THE RELIGIOUS OPINIONS OF MILTON, LOCKE AND NEWTON. By Principal H. McLachlan, M.A., D.D. Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1941. 221 pp. 7/6.

tain aspects of *Paradise Regained* (1671) suggest low Arian or even humanitarian trends in his thinking. How well his own growth illustrates the maxim of the *Areopagitica*: "Truth is . . . a streaming fountain." With what joy Channing must have written his famous review of the *Treatise on Christian Doctrine* when, after 250 years of unaccountable suppression, it was published in 1825. To think that Milton, whose epics had been to the Calvinist clergy what *Pilgrim's Progress* had been to the laity, was confessedly heterodox!

Our author stresses Milton's affinity with the Christian Humanists of the Renaissance, particularly the Italian Anti-trinitarians. Like them, his fervent classic studies at Horton (1632-8) furnished the compost of those rationalistic and anti-ecclesiastical criteria by which, along with the aid of vast Biblical and rabbinical erudition, he assailed the evils of "old priest" and "new presbyter." Indeed, it is our conviction that for the period of his life from Cambridge to his Italian journey, he was more Stoic than Christian. We believe that his self-negation of the lust for fame thereby engendered in a young man so strongly conscious of both an extraordinary genius and a divine vocation, and his deliberate devotion of his powers to England's struggle for freedom quite refute Principal McLachlan's dictum that: "Milton passed through no conversion experience . . . in common with Emerson, Parker and other liberal Christians . . . he belonged to the once-born" (p. 28). But what of his own words in the *Academics* and the *Epistles to Deodati*? Emerson knew Milton better than that! Let us not surrender so easily to the "Mass and Maypole" school of reactionaries with their facile propaganda that the typical Unitarian experience, whether Theistic, Transcendental or even Humanist, is either simple or shallow!

The studies of Locke and Newton are equally definitive. That both men were privately heterodox not only with respect to the Trinity but on other points as well there can be no doubt. Exhaustive, unbiased study of the New Testament was a common basis, as with Milton. Like Milton, who knew the Racovian Catechism and possibly John Bidle, Locke was also intimately acquainted with Unitarians in the Firmin Circle and with their writings. His deep sympathy with Dissent is exposed with astonishing plausibility; his appreciation of the Quakers, whose meetings he attended in Holland with the future William III, is interestingly revealed. Like Newton, Locke deemed it wise to conceal the full extent of his heterodoxy in private papers which were not published till 1829 (Newton's in 1785); but we doubt if fear of persecution such as had befallen Bury and John Smith, or even of the stringent penalties of the Blasphemy Act of 1698, was the deciding factor for such inexplicitness. When one takes the position that Christian doctrines are secondary to Christian conduct (*Cf.* Locke: "The right and only way to saving orthodoxy is the sincere and steady purpose of a good life," p. 89), it follows that he is under no proper reproach should he be taciturn about doctrinal irregularity. Newton projected his scientific monotheism into the mighty fellowship of Freemasonry whose revival and development were managed chiefly by his protégés and friends in the Royal Society. Locke's philosophy dominated rational

supranaturalism all over Europe and in New England. Reticence may sometimes be more influential than publicity!

Is there any timeliness in a book of even such excellence as this? Yes! We can well use its proof that "magna est veritas et praevaluit!" Moreover, there is high inspiration in reading calm, factual appraisals written during an autumn and winter of devastating bombings of Manchester, in spite of which Dr. McLachlan's religious faith could produce a "V" work of such perfect courage: "a fresh study of three great Englishmen, to whom liberty and tolerance meant so much, may not prove to be without interest in a time when these basal principles are so seriously menaced" (Preface, p. vii).

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CHARLES LYTTLE

### HAYDON'S LOGIC OF DEITY

Biography is art, and so is *Biography of the Gods*, the third book by A. Eustace Haydon.<sup>1</sup> Behind it lies not only an almost unbelievably massive amount of research, but years of patient reflection on the theoretical foundations of his own Science of Comparative Religion and its empirical material, as well as on the philosophical problems occasioned by religion. As in his previous works theory, history and philosophy are subtly woven together. To say that *Biography of the Gods* is art is not to impugn the research and reflection underlying it. It is to express with almost consummate admiration that Professor Haydon has with large, bold and yet deft and sure strokes presented the great "living" deities so as to leave an impression upon the reader which generously approximates the grandeur of their majestic careers. Sometimes, to be sure, his judgments are so sweeping, packed, or condensed that those interested in the Science of Religion would profit by long discussions about the material before voicing disagreement, and one ends by wishing that the 325 pages of attractive prose had been expanded to 800 pages of dull scholarly pros and cons and unartistic scholarly bickering which would reveal the rich and precise empirical background of his judgments.

The opening sentences of the Preface set the stage for the whole work: "The gods are on this side of the mystery that enshrouds the universe. Like man they are earthborn. The roots of their lives are in the rich soil of human hopes and hungerings." Put into prosaic language, the gods have an historical and a social and psychological origin, which is as open to men as the degree to which the facts are made accessible by research.

In his opening chapter Professor Haydon reaffirms in passing his long-held opinion that "Emotion not intellect, mothered the earliest gods," who grew out of "things" touched by emotion to become beings enlisted in the social interests of the group. Beside the emotional response to natural

<sup>1</sup>BIOGRAPHY OF THE GODS. By A. Eustace Haydon. New York: Macmillan, 1941. 352 pp. \$2.50.



forces which was "certainly the original source from which the gods arose" was "the achievement of the twin ideas of soul and spirit." While Haydon accords only logical, never chronological priority to emotional responses to "helpful natural forces," even this can be questioned on the psychological grounds that early man probably was possessed, as we today certainly are, of an undifferentiated response which is the common bourn of emotion ("glow" of feeling), imagination, and idea. Such a position would make unnecessary both the ascription of logical priority to emotion and the continuation of the crusade against what was, of course, the one-sided intellectualism of all too many theorists from Spencer and Tyler onward. This would be possible without falling into the pit of primitive monotheism, of Pater Schmidt's or any other variety. Moreover, it would make possible at least an attempt at handling the problem of "cosmic order" (apart from "creator gods"), so prominent in much literature, but which Haydon does not here touch at all. Finally, it would make unnecessary the long, persistent, and unending campaign he seems to carry on against philosophy (particularly metaphysics). It would tumble philosophy to its properly modest position and place the "intellectual" and the "common man" in a basically much less antithetical position with reference to each other than does the account which he provides. When Haydon says that the "Eternal One" of the philosopher was born "less than three thousand years ago" he may be empirically correct, but I should be very hesitant about affirming with him, on the basis of what evidence we have, that it "had *no* [italics mine] relation to the historic deities of primeval ages."

The chapters on "How the Gods Change" and "The Gods Who Died" abundantly illustrate from the Mediterranean and Teutonic world the various causes of change and death among men's deities. Perhaps reading the book on the top of pyramids reared to the now "dead" gods of Mexico made me sensitive to their having been slighted, along with others. In any event the selection of material almost exclusively from the Mediterranean world tends to perpetuate the traditional pattern of "Our Cultural Heritage," and similar parochialisms which Haydon has always so fruitfully transcended.

The "living" gods, Haydon insists without fear of theological relativism, like the "dead" gods have been phases of "the life process of a people" or peoples. Not many of the great ones of history have survived. Their biographies as unfolded by Haydon are seldom intimate (though Amatarasu is permitted a strip-tease dance) and are hardly detailed. Their bold outlines are delicately dovetailed into the large eras of the social history in which they have played and still play their spectacular roles.

Each "living" god has left a great pattern of life and some have left patterns, ideas, and emphases that continue so unbroken and on so large a scale that even today they compete for planetary supremacy among themselves and against their common enemies. So to name but a few, Allah still rules the universe largely by the law of his will. Yahweh represents god in cultural history. Ahura Mazda continues to "battle" against evil. The Christian god of love, peace, and justice has not ceased to promulgate

a plan for salvation for men in this world and the next. Buddha today as aforesaid stands for the transcendent spiritual ideal of the individual.

The gods live by men's faith in their works; but, says Haydon, modern faith tempered by scientific knowledge of our world is "modest." That may be so. In any event, though many minor deities have been born since ancient days, no major deity has emerged since Allah. The present company of gods have witnessed as yet the birth of no great rival who threatens to challenge them and give vital expression to the this-worldly, naturalistic, idealistic, historically minded and collectivistically inclined temper of our day. Each is seeking to expropriate the wealth of his rivals—an old story—or trying to bend the world and its ways to his will or character. When he fails, he adjusts himself as best he can. Living gods are functions of living cultures, and new gods mean new cultural traditions. We of today, however, may be living in a hitherto unexperienced trend of history in which all gods may be collectively undermined and in which god-making and even god-preserving as human activities are in the balance. Cultural changes, so dangerous to gods, may fail to provide new deities of adequate might and may undermine the old gods of the folk and the intellectual alike. Despite the present emergence of traditional supernaturalisms we may be witnessing the "Twilight of the Gods." Science, theoretical and practical, linked to philosophy may cut off metaphysical support for the gods and deal a death blow to the gods of the people. And "if the gods of the people perish," says Haydon, "there are no gods beyond." It is unwise to predict, but there are, I believe, many indications that the contemporary world is taking the same futile road travelled by fifth and fourth century Greece, and there is really little indication, as Haydon seems to believe, of the "Twilight of the Gods."

If the gods perish, however, the keystone of Haydon's theory and philosophy would continue to hold firm the arch of religion. The moral values of religion—also of the people—are, according to Haydon, logically prior to as indeed they are actually deeper in experience than even those epic figures of ages of imaginative labors. Hence he can say, "More needful than faith in God is faith that man can give love, justice, peace and all his beloved moral values embodiment in human relations. Denial of this is the only real atheism."

And so Haydon comes back to belief—belief that values are secure in their capacity for embodiment. Is this "bootleg" theology? It is difficult to say. In any event, we have no longer an explicit and narrow expression of faith in "scientific method" as the technique of embodiment of values, which came so close to being apotheosized in *The Quest of the Ages*. Nor do we have any hint of an elaboration of a "new strategy," called for in his *Search for the Good Life*. Only faith gains expression and remains to stand guard against his highly individualized conception of atheism. Is this a new orthodoxy? One hopes not, for there are and probably will continue to be those who support at least another if not a more fundamental emphasis in religion. They are not concerned either to affirm or to deny Haydon's "faith" that values are secure in their embodiment—on



a short or a long term basis. Amid the finalities of life they wonder, reflect, search out the facts of life and the nature of the world. They live by the knowledge they obtain which gives substance to whatever values exist. They are minded that the undeified truth, even in so far as it is only partially apprehended and without chance of embodiment, is sufficient to make men free.

Ultimately, of course, Haydon's view of religion is not empirically but logically grounded. Empirically the gods, who represent the "daring confidence of man that the universe in its deepest meaning does allow and give support to our human hopes and ideal," have existed from the dawn of human history. At least evidence for their non-existence is negative and not positive and would apply equally to moral values. The logic of Haydon's position I understand to be as follows: Culture and religion are co-original, with religion representing confidence in the embodiment of value. Culture and religion are logically prior to the gods who are not indispensable functions of religion. May one, then, distinguish between folk religion, with its ever present gods, and that of the intellectuals of Haydon's persuasion, just as Haydon distinguishes between the real gods of the folk and the abstractions of the philosophers and theologians, and then ask further whether this logic of religion is not as "abstract and meaningless" as the abstractions of the theologians and philosophers whom Haydon so subtly seeks to undermine? Theologians, however, never believe they lose touch altogether with the religion of the folk. Neither, of course, does Haydon—and rightly so. Haydon's judgment on the gods of the theologians and his own abstract logic of religion, which few, certainly not I, would venture to call meaningless—these too are a part of the "biography of the gods" or, put without benefit of deity, the passage of time.

Biography is art. In this biography, heavily buttressed by scientific effort, the gods have been accorded high honor, great glory, fine appreciation, deep affection, sufficient justice and, I am inclined to believe, considerably more mercy and graciousness than historically they have extended to men. Historically some men have been damned, but no god has failed to share fully in Haydon's magnanimity and gentle kindness.

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